



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 10

Price 5 cents

OLD SLEUTH'S GREATEST CASE



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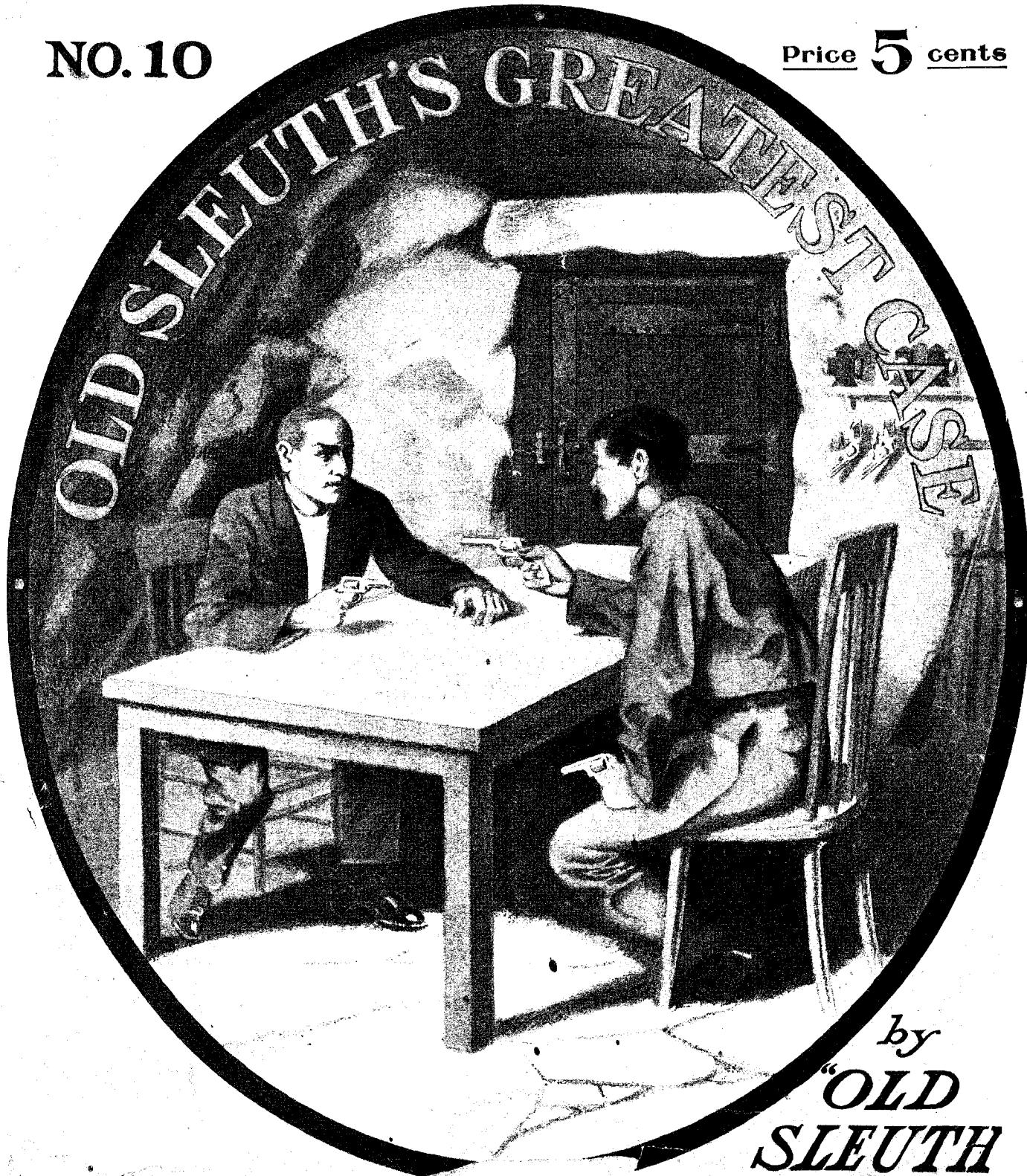
by
"OLD
SLEUTH"



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A Series of
**THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES
EVER PUBLISHED**

No. 10.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A.
AUGUST 21st, 1908.

Vol. I.

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Application made at Cleveland, Ohio, Post Office, for Second Class Entry.

Old Sleuth's Greatest Case

OR

CAUGHT BY THE KING OF ALL DETECTIVES

By "OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

"Old Sleuth, I believe?"

"That is my name, sir!"

The first speaker was an aged gentleman, evidently an invalid, bolstered up in a large armchair, in a handsomely furnished apartment.

The salutation with which we open our story, was addressed to a peculiar-looking old man, who had just been shown into the room.

Very few, as they gazed upon him in his present garb, would have taken that ordinary-looking old chap for the most famous and skillful detective that ever "piped" a thief, or brought an assassin to the gallows.

As the great detective took a chair, by request, the old invalid said:

"You saw my personal calling for an interview with you, in the 'Herald'?"

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Gasquoine."

"So I am aware," replied Sleuth, in his usual manner, so distinguished for brevity and directness.

"Mr. Sleuth, I have been robbed of millions!"

"Your loss has not been made public?" replied the detective, quietly.

"No, sir; nor do I want it made public. I would rather pocket the loss."

"You suspect your own flesh and blood of the robbery?" said Sleuth, abruptly.

Mr. Gasquoine's face assumed a ghastly expression; his breath came short and quick; he glared at Old Sleuth with an expression of wild terror, as he gasped:

"Who told you that? Great Heaven! No, sir! no, sir! I do not suspect my own flesh and blood!"

"That was merely a random query, sir."

"What led you to think that I suspected my own flesh and blood of the robbery?"

"Merely the fact that you were so particular to keep your loss from the public."

"Oh—a—ah! I see! Well, sir, you are mistaken! I have other reasons for keeping my loss from the public."

"Tell me the story of your loss."

"First, let us understand each other. Will you undertake the case?"

"Possibly."

"I have great inducements to offer."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, it will be necessary for you to employ several other skillful gentlemen in your line of business."

"There are several, sir, who have been marvelously successful as detectives."

"They are the kind of men we want."

"Their services can probably be procured."

"I propose, Mr. Sleuth, to offer you, as a reward for the successful prosecution of this matter, *half a million dollars!*"

Sleuth was at once keenly interested.

As our old readers well know, the detective had married a very wealthy woman; but now we have a little secret to tell them. Like many others, he and his wife had been compelled to see a very large proportion of their riches take wings. Various speculations had furnished the wings that had flown away with such a large portion of his wife's fortune, and the offer of the present job came like the discovery of a gold mine, or the news that certain supposed worthless stock had risen to par value.

Following the announcement of the amount of reward by Mr. Gasquoine, Sleuth had remained for some moments lost in thought. At length he said:

"If you think, sir, that I am competent to undertake this job, my services are at your command."

"Then, sir, you can consider yourself engaged, and there is no further reason why I should not tell you the story of the loss."

"I am ready to hear it."

"Since the numerous bank robberies, I became nervous about leaving my property on special deposit in the bank vaults, as I was compelled to leave it there at my own risk. Now, then, Mr. Sleuth, we approach the first mystery in this matter. For certain reasons, I never confided in anybody concerning my wealth; I never confided the fact to anybody that I had

removed my bonds from the bank, and yet I have reasons to think, now, that not only the fact of my possessing these bonds was known, but also that I had withdrawn them from the bank and brought them home to my residence."

"Then your property was stolen from the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you the least suspicion as to who the thief was?"

The old millionaire did not make an immediate reply. For some moments he appeared lost in a painful reverie.

Sleuth's keen eyes were fastened upon him, and the detective saw that the old man was studying how to evade a certain revelation. Hoping to assist him, he remarked:

"Any secret, sir, is as safe with me as though it were unrevealed."

"I will say, frankly," at length said the old man, "that I would prefer avoiding a revelation if possible, but necessity compels me to make a confidant of you."

"You will not find your confidence misplaced."

"We now approach the second mystery," said the old banker, after an interval of thought. "I had an adopted child living with me; she disappeared upon the same day that the bonds must have been stolen."

As the old millionaire made this statement, a great sob struggled up from his bosom, and tears trickled down his wrinkled cheeks.

"Was this adopted daughter in any way connected with you, sir?"

"No," answered the millionaire, as a spasm swept across his features.

"How long had she lived with you?"

"Seventeen years."

"How old was she when you took her under your protecting care?"

"An infant of thirteen months."

"Then this young lady is now about eighteen years of age!"

"Yes, sir."

"Did she know that she was not your child?"

"I had always taught her to bear in mind that she was only an adopted daughter," replied the millionaire, as a second spasm swept across his features.

"Of course that was the truth!" said Sleuth, carelessly.

"Certainly it was the truth!" replied the old man, with singular vehemence.

"Otherwise you treated this girl as though she were your own daughter?"

"Had she been my own flesh and blood I could not have loved her more than I did."

"Did you intend to make her your heiress?"

"What pertinency has that to the matter?"

"We detectives like to get all the facts; but I will alter the question. Did you ever give this girl any reason to believe that you intended to bequeath your fortune to her?"

"I never gave her to understand that I possessed a fortune."

"Do you think she suspected that you did?"

"If she did she possessed the cunning brain of a devil under the mask of an angel face!"

After giving utterance to the above remark the old man cast his eyes to the floor thoughtfully, and murmured, seemingly unconsciously:

"It would not be strange if she did; her moth—"

Suddenly recollecting himself he checked the partly spoken word, and as he raised his eyes he encountered the keen glance of the detective fastened upon him, and the old man blushed like a young maid.

The detective instantly sought to relieve the old gentleman's embarrassment by asking:

"Is your adopted daughter a beauty?"

"One of the most beautiful creatures your eye ever rested upon."

"Was she accomplished?"

"She has received every advantage that money could provide."

"Had she any particular acquaintance—male acquaintance, I mean?"

"Not to my knowledge; she had not entered society, and never received a gentleman visitor that I am aware of."

"Were you ever married, Mr. Gasquoine?"

"Never," was the reply, as a third spasm swept over the old gentleman's features.

"What other inmates were there of your household besides this girl?"

"None permanently, save my housekeeper and an old female servant."

"You say none permanently; did you ever have visitors who remained for any length of time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who were they?"

"A nephew and niece."

"How long since these two latter persons were inmates of your house?"

"Two years."

"Where do they reside now?"

"I do not know; I have never seen or heard from them since I drove them from the house."

"Then you had a misunderstanding with them?"

"I had."

"What was the nature of it?"

"It was a mere family difficulty."

"What countryman are you, Mr. Gasquoine?"

"I was born in France, sir."

"Your nephew and niece, also?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any other relatives in this country?"

"I am not aware that I have any other relatives in the world."

"Then," said Sleuth, slowly and deliberately, who, while pretending to glance at the floor, was really watching the old gentleman out of the corner of his eye, in a manner peculiar to him, "if an accident should befall this adopted"—(the detective put a peculiar emphasis on the word "adopted")—"child of yours, your nephew and niece would be your heirs at law?"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed the old gentleman, excitedly, "what do you mean by an accident happening to my adopted child?"

"Well, for instance, suppose she should be murdered for the purpose of getting her out of the way?"

"Murdered! murdered!" gasped the old man, in a husky voice, "my child murdered! oh, no, oh, no! do not say that. Mercy! mercy! such a retribution would be too horrible!"

A keen observer, reading the face of Old Sleuth at this moment, would not have been surprised when told of his wonderful acuteness.

From the first, Sleuth had felt a strange suspicion, and with that marvelous cunning peculiar to him, like a wary cross-examining lawyer, he had led the old gentleman along by guarded questions until finally he had suddenly sprung a trap that not only resulted in confirming his suspicions, but in assuring him he had struck upon one of those wonderful romances in real life, such as the imagination of the novelist could never conceive.

The detective had accomplished his purpose; he had suddenly opened the door, and as suddenly closed it again, by remarking, indifferent:

"The girl may turn up any time within a day or two, but as to the bonds, we will have to find those!"

"Recover the girl alive, Mr. Sleuth, and you shall receive half the sum I promised you, if you never recover a dollar's worth of the bonds."

"Ah! I thought so," murmured Sleuth, aside.

The detective's next question came direct and pointed, as usual. He said:

"What is the character of this nephew?"

"It has always baffled me to determine his real character—he's either a saint or a villain."

"He plays the rôle of a saint, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then he is probably a scamp."

"You're a strange man, Mr. Sleuth, and I am at a loss to know why you should so hastily come to the conclusion that my nephew is a villain."

"Well, you see, sir, it is necessary that we should come to rapid conclusions so that we can proceed to work; this nephew of yours is the first man that I shall look after."

"But how about my adopted daughter?"

"Well, we must hunt her up, but she don't know anything about the bonds."

"I can't fathom you, sir."

"It's a part of my business to carry my secrets under a brass face; but, once again, let me ask you a few questions. Do you know the circumstances under which your adopted daughter left the house?"

"I certainly do."

"Please relate them."

CHAPTER II.

THE statement made by Mr. Gasquoine was, that his adopted daughter was in the habit of taking a walk every fair afternoon, and that, upon the day that she disappeared, she had gone forth as usual.

"Was she seen to leave the house?"

"Yes, sir. I saw her leave myself."

"Was she dressed as though for any particular occasion?"

"No, sir; she wore her usual walking apparel."

"She carried no bundle?"

"None."

"Did she carry a satchel?"

"No, sir."

"And she has never been seen since that afternoon when she went forth two weeks ago?"

"Not quite two weeks ago; it will be two weeks on Friday."

"That's immaterial. She hasn't been seen since she left upon that occasion?"

"Now, then, Mr. Sleuth, we approach the third mystery. The servant positively asserts that she saw Frances, my adopted daughter, pass the basement window, and ascend the front door stoop, and immediately after, heard the hall door close."

"Was she seen to go out again?"

"Now let me explain where the mystery comes in. The servant said that it was quarter past five when Frances passed the basement window and entered the house; on the contrary, the housekeeper says that the servant is mistaken, as she, Mrs. Vance, was seated at the front-parlor windows, from half past four until six o'clock; that during that time no one ascended the front stoop nor entered the hall door."

Upon hearing the contradictory statements of the two women, Old Sleuth pricked up his ears.

"How long has that housekeeper lived with you?"

"Fifteen years."

"How old a woman is she?"

"I should say about forty."

"Did you ever discover anything from her conversation to indicate that she sympathized with your nephew and niece?"

"Never but once—the day after I had ordered my relatives from the house, she told me that she thought it was cruel to turn off my own flesh and blood, and protect the child of a stranger."

"She has never expressed herself since upon the subject, then?"

"Never."

"Was she fond of your adopted daughter?"

"She has always professed to be, but sometimes the suspicion has flashed across my mind that she secretly hated Frances."

"I reckon that your suspicions were well founded."

"You come to very rapid conclusions, Mr. Sleuth."

"Yes; that is one of my peculiarities," and Sleuth added: "Now, then, Mr. Gasquoine, I should like to have, if possible, the photographs of three persons you have named; have you the pictures of your adopted daughter, your nephew and niece?"

"I have, fortunately."

A few moments later the detective was put in possession of the three photographs which he had desired; after glancing at them carelessly, he bestowed them in his pocket, and rising from his chair, said:

"Mr. Gasquoine, I want you to order a load of wood, and order it to be sawed upon the sidewalk."

"That's a singular request," remarked the millionaire.

"Yes, sir," replied Sleuth, "but it's the first step toward the recovery of your millions."

After some further explanations, the detective departed.

Upon the following day, along in the afternoon, a load of wood was dumped upon the sidewalk in front of Mr. Gasquoine's unpretentious residence.

A few moments after the dumping of the wood, an old gray-haired man, having the appearance of being an Irishman, came along, with a buck and saw.

Seeing in the wood a prospective job, the old man went to the basement door and rang the bell.

When the servant appeared, in answer to his ring, the old man asked, in a rich brogue:

"Are ye wantin' that wood sawed up?"

The servant, who was a middle-aged Irish-woman, replied:

"Yis, that's the ordthers to have it sawed; but 'pon me word, an old man like you would never be able to do it. Faith! 'twould take ye till Christmas."

"Faith!" replied the Irishman, giving a lively step with his feet, "maybe ye wouldn't think me so ould if I should throw my arms around your neck and steal a kiss from your pertty lips."

"Faith! ye do same to have plenty of life left in ye!"

"Life, is it? be the powers! I'll wager ye a kiss that I'll have it all sawed and packed away inside of an hour."

"Go on, then: ye may as well earn the money as a younger man, if ye're able."

The old man went to his work, and true to his word, had the wood sawed in the time he had mentioned, and commenced carrying it in.

After discharging the second basketful in the cellar, he strode into the kitchen and asked for a drink of water.

After drinking the water, instead of passing from the kitchen to the hall, and so out into the street, he went through into the front basement.

The girl, being busy, did not observe his movements until she started to enter the basement herself, when she was surprised to see the old Irishman in there taking views through the basement windows, from different parts of the room.

"What are you doin' in here?" she exclaimed, angrily.

"Whist, now!" replied the old man. "I came through into this room by mistake. What a nice, high basement ye have. Faith! ye'd have no nade to go to the second story if there was a procession goin' by."

"Why not?"

"Because ye could see it so well from right here, now."

"Faith! I wish the housekeeper above had heard ye say that."

"Faith! now that's quare? Why should ye want anybody to hear me speakin'—could anybody doubt the fact?"

"Well, I know won thing, that there was a

body went by there on the sidewalk that I've been in the habit of saying daily for the past nine years, and yet they're trying to tell me that I was decaved and never saw her at all."

"Wid such a fine pair o' eyes as ye have! Faith they must be crazy!"

Everybody knows how natural it is for a person, said to be mistaken, especially one holding a subordinate position, to desire to put themselves right.

"See here, now," she said, "now just listen! faith! I'll tell ye somethin', but ye mustn't mention it. There's a young lady missin' from this house. Well, it's said that she never come back to it since she left it first, but I'll lay me oath that she did, for I saw her go by them very windows and go up the stoop."

"'Pou me soul but that's square!"

"Faith! it is wonderful! But, whist, now, there's won thing that bothers me about the same affair; now this same young lady, of course it was her, but she looked a bit *taller*; now I lay that to me lookin' up at her out of the winders."

"Did she look much taller?" asked the old man, innocently.

"Well, I must say that it kind o' bothered me."

"Indade, now. And the housekeeper, she must go and contradict ye, eh?"

"Faith! she says if I say any more about it she'll have me discharged, and I've lived eleven years in this house!"

"Well, she must be a mane body; but I must git in the rest of the wood now," added the wood-sawyer, and he passed out of the basement.

The servant went back to her work, and forgot all about the old man until about two hours afterward, when she went to the door and found the buck and saw in the ax-a-way, and the wood lying upon the sidewalk.

"Faith! what has become of the old man?" she muttered, and she made the same inquiry for many a day after.

Had the servant-girl who had been so confidential to the old wood-sawyer, heard the muttered remarks that fell from the latter's lips as he strode away, leaving buck and saw behind him, she would have been saved many an after query as to what had become of him.

One thing that would have startled her, would have been the fact, that the old man who rolled out such a noble brogue, soliloquized in about an incisive English as one would wish to hear.

"So far, so good," muttered the seeming old Irishman; "that servant is perfectly honest. She saw what she saw, but not the missing girl, Frances; some one wearing the latter's clothes, only a little *taller* than their original owner.

"This thing opens well, and gives me a theory at once; in the first place, this housekeeper, Mrs. Vance, requires a little 'piping,' the next one requiring to be looked after is this nephew of the old gentleman.

"I think that—" At this instant the old man's soliloquy was interrupted by the pressure of a firm grasp upon his arm, and the startling salutation:

"You're my prisoner!"

The seeming old Irishman straightened up instantly, and his feeble old frame assumed a very singular vigorous tone, as he turned about and met the dark, piercing eyes of a dark-haired, tawny-complexioned, handsome young man.

Instantly his body drooped to its former semblance of feebleness as he replied:

"Go 'long about yer business, you black-faced gypsy! and don't be foolin' wid yer betters."

The gypsy-faced stranger laughed good-naturedly as he said:

"Drop to yourself, Harry, old boy, and let's know what 'lay out' is this you are on."

It was the seeming old Irishman's turn to laugh now, as he replied:

"So you spotted my 'rig out,' eh, Tremaine?"

"If there's one man in New York that Old Sleuth couldn't blind, I'm that man, Harry!"

"Well, this is a lucky meeting, Phil; and, by the way, have you got a job on hand? If not, I've got the biggest 'lay out' for you, Mr. Gypsy; that ever set your brains to work."

"That's all right, Harry; but first tell me what induced Old Sleuth to get into harness again?"

Old Sleuth, in his usual peregruous manner, related the fact of the personal in the "Herold" calling for him, his subsequent interview

with the old millionaire, and his proceedings thus far in developing the clews.

"And half a million the pay, eh?" said the Gypsy Detective, in surprise, after Sleuth had concluded his narrative.

"Exactly, and the money sure, as I have satisfied myself, if we are rewarded by success."

"And do you intend to take a fellow on?"

"Consider yourself under pay from this moment, my boy."

The Gypsy Detective was thoughtful for a moment.

His handsome face assumed that keen, business-like expression peculiar to it, as he asked:

"What style of rig did this girl have on when she was last seen?"

Sleuth described her appearance accurately, having obtained a pretty correct description from the old millionaire.

"See here," said the Gypsy, suddenly, in his own peculiarly abrupt manner, "let's drop in somewhere off the street; I think I've got a 'flash in' on this thing already."

The two detectives repaired to a neighboring restaurant, and were speedily locked in a room by themselves, when the Gypsy Detective said: "You've heard of that Western detective that broke up that gang of forgers a few years ago, back of St. Louis?"

"You mean the chap who went by the name of Old Electricity, and Harry Light, the Lightning Detective?"

"The same man; and I'll tell you that gentleman was the central figure in one of the greatest romances in real life that ever happened in this country."

"So I've understood."

"Well, in working up that gang of forgers out West, he made an enemy. Two years ago a four-year-old daughter of his was stolen, and he's been on the track to find his own child ever since."

"And he's employed you to assist him?"

"He has."

"Have you struck a scent?"

"I think we have; and now, old man, here comes a very remarkable feature of this affair: We've been two months 'piping' a certain gang; we've laid close to them until we've dropped to their rendezvous. We're on the lookout for one individual, a daring, skillful scoundrel, named Alteo."

"I have heard of that fellow."

"All right. Well, here's where the coincidence comes in: Somewhere about two weeks ago, while 'piping' this rendezvous, I saw a woman that answers the description of the missing girl to a dot, enter that house."

Old Sleuth gave a start of surprise, as the Gypsy Detective went on and said:

"Now, old man, both trails may run to the same burrow. What do you say to consolidating the two jobs?"

"Nothing easier. It will require three or four of us, and the pay is large enough."

"I've got the fourth man."

"Who is he?"

"The Jupiter Detective."

"By Jupiter! Phil, you've forestalled me. He's just the chap that I was going for! Have you any reason to think that he'll get into harness again?"

"I'm sure of it."

"How about this Lightning Detective—is he in town?"

"He will be at Crawford's to night."

That same evening subsequent to the interview above described, four remarkable men, famous in their several roles, were gathered in the private parlor of a private hotel located in a central part of the city of New York.

The first of these men whom we shall describe, was a splendidly developed man, a trifle under six feet in height, with a face whose expression was calculated to command respect in any circle.

There was a quiet indication of the reserved power of a couchant lion.

A man whom the most desperate would hesitate to offend, and yet there was such an air of gentleness about him that a child could approach him in perfect confidence.

This remarkable-looking young man, of thirty-seven or eight, was Harry Loveland, otherwise celebrated as Old Sleuth, the great detective.

Sitting opposite to the individual above described was a man somewhat younger.

The latter was a strikingly handsome man, with classic features, slender but tall and graceful form. He was the perfect type of a South

ern gentleman, and every movement betrayed that restless fiery courage characteristic of the old-time Southerner.

This handsome individual was Barrett Griffin, otherwise famous as "Harry Light, the Lightning Detective."

Another young man in the room possessed no striking personal characteristics, save a pleasant good-natured face and a reckless, dare-devil manner and countenance.

The latter's features were of a Celtic cast, and our readers will at once recognize Campbell O'Brien, otherwise famous as "Fergus Conner, the Irish Detective"—a man of such reckless daring as to appear to rely upon the bearing of a charmed life.

Last but not least among this quartet of celebrities was a dark-haired, dark-eyed, tawny-complexioned young man.

This latter individual was smaller in stature, and the most youthful of the whole party, and yet what he lacked in age and experience was supplemented by a marvelous coolness and nerve in moments of peril which made him at least the peer of his more experienced companions.

This handsome young man above described was Philip Tremaine, otherwise known as the "Gypsy Detective."

CHAPTER III.

The four noted detectives described in the previous chapter were in consultation, at the time we present them to our readers, concerning the best and surest method for unraveling the two mysteries which had attracted their professional ingenuity.

Upon the following night two farmer-like-looking men might have been seen strolling down Broadway.

Arrived in front of the St. Nicholas Hotel, the two gentlemen turned into the broad entrance and sauntered along the marble flagged hall toward the gilded and brilliantly illuminated bar-room in the rear.

After gazing around at the various objects of interest, the two countrymen seated themselves, and appeared to watch with rapt delight the stream of humanity that passed to and from the bar.

Presently three men, loudly dressed, and whom an old New Yorker would at once pronounce gamblers, sauntered up toward the bar.

The moment these three latter individuals entered, the smaller in size of the two countrymen turned toward his companion, and by a peculiar signal, as unobservable to the uninitiated as a Masonic sign, called attention to the three men who had just entered.

The taller of the two countrymen at once picked up a newspaper, and pretended to be deeply engrossed in its contents, but an interested observer would have noticed that from under the brim of his slouched hat a keen pair of eyes were surveying the three men at the bar from head to foot.

After some moments, the two countrymen arose as though about to depart and see the elephant in another direction.

They passed out on to Broadway, and from under their slouched hats, while pretending to be wondering at the many attractions, they were really scanning the features of every one who passed them.

Presently, one of the three men whom they had been watching at the bar, passed under the flash of a gaslight alone.

"There's your man," whispered the smaller of the two countrymen to the other.

"I see him, Phil," was the reply of the taller one, adding, instantly: "And now, comrade, if I get cowed on this lay out, remember what you've got to do up in Pennsylvania."

"You'll go through, my boy."

"So I'm hoping; but this is the riskiest old 'squeeze' I ever tried to work through, I'm thinking, but here she goes; no time to spare—have the hounds around for the whistle, and I'll jab my head in the jaws of death."

The two men exchanged a quiet shake of the hand, when, with a rapid step, the Irish Detective moved along in pursuit of the man whom he and his 'pal' had recognized under the flash of the gaslight!

The Irish Detective was a remarkably athletic man.

Although not of unusual stature, his personal strength was extraordinary, as every muscle in his wiry frame was thoroughly developed and hardened.

The individual whom he had set out to

shadow when parting with the Gypsy Detective on Broadway, was one of the most desperate characters known to the police.

He was shrewd, desperate, and possessed a great deal of brutal courage, combined with the utmost heartlessness.

The individual whom we have described, backed by half a score of rascals, equally as desperate, if less influential than himself, was the man the Irish Detective was pitted against and set upon to shadow.

No general ever studied a plan of battle with better judgment than did Campbell O'Brien, or Fergus Connors, as we shall call him, study how to work himself into the confidence of Balfour Nolen.

Unconscious of the fact that he was being followed, the great thief proceeded up Broadway for some distance, when he turned off, and, proceeding a block and a half down a cross street, ascended the stoop and rang the door-bell of a very imposing mansion.

The outer door was speedily opened, and the man entered.

Ten minutes later Fergus Connors, still disguised as a countryman, stood in front of the building, and for a moment appeared undetermined what to do.

While standing on the corner, still revolving in his mind how he should proceed, he was accosted by an elderly man, who claimed to be a little near sighted, and requested to be shown to the very house that the detective wished to enter.

One keen glance and Fergus Connors was satisfied that his interrogator was a stranger in the city, and he said, for the purpose of some chance development:

"I can point out the house to you, sir, but are you aware of its character?"

"Are you?" was the blunt query in reply.

"Yes, sir; I am a frequenter of the house."

"Ah! then probably you can aid me. I have a card from a gentleman of Philadelphia," and the stranger mentioned the name of a famous gambler of the latter city, who was well known to the detective by reputation.

An idea immediately entered the mind of Fergus Connors, and he said, mentioning the name of the Philadelphia gambler:

"Murdene is a great friend of mine."

"It's lucky I met you," said the old man, "as I am a stranger in this 'crib' here; may I ask your name?"

"My name is Bidwell," was the prompt answer.

"Well, Bidwell, I'd be obliged to you if you would pioneer me."

"I would take great pleasure in doing so, but it might be just as well for you to give me your card, and I'll present that anyhow to prevent any delay by way of explanations."

The old gentleman took out his wallet, and taking therefrom a card, handed it to Fergus Connors, who glanced at it by the light of a neighboring gas lamp, and then said, sternly, placing his hand upon the stranger's shoulder:

"I'm a detective officer."

"Suppose you are. Why do you arrest me? Why, sir, I'm a gentleman. I'm a well-known merchant!"

"Your story may be correct, sir, but I have no proof of it."

"But I can furnish proof."

"How?"

"If you will accompany me to the hotel, the clerk will satisfy you as to who I am."

"Very well, sir; if you can satisfy me that what you say is correct, all right; but, for reasons which it is not necessary to explain, I would advise you not to try to get into that house to-night, or any other time."

"By Jove! I don't think I shall. But come — we'll go to the hotel, and I'll satisfy you as to who I am."

Arrived at the hotel, the Philadelphian man asked the clerk to identify him.

The latter put on considerable airs and swagger, when the Irish Detective exhibited a badge that caused him to alter his style instantly.

After a moment or two the Irish Detective appeared satisfied with the explanation, and upon informing the stranger that he had been very fortunate, turned to go away, when the Philadelphian asked him to step inside, and said:

"There will be no publicity attached to this little affair, I hope, Mr. Detective?"

"No, sir; but for the present, if you'll take my advice, you'll take your pastime in Philadelphia."

A quarter of an hour later the Irish Detective

rang the door-bell of the gambling-house where his quarry had entered.

CHAPTER IV.

The door was speedily opened in answer to the Irish Detective's ring, and the man found himself in a vestibule fronting an inner door.

There was a sliding panel in the latter, which was raised, and through the aperture appeared the face of a keen-eyed, heavy-mustached man.

With a confident air, the detective presented the card which he had procured from the Philadelphian.

The man who was looking through the panel glanced at the little pasteboard, and then said:

"All right."

Presently the door opened, and the Irish Detective, a moment later, was ushered into a brilliantly lighted and luxuriously furnished parlor.

Lounging about in great easy-chairs and stretched out upon comfortable lounges were a number of men.

The advent of a stranger usually excited but little comment, but the presence of the Irish Detective, in his disguise as a countryman, aroused considerable curiosity.

"By Jove! who in thunder is that chap?" was the whispered inquiry which passed from one to the other.

The subject of these interrogatories seated himself nonchalantly, when, after a brief interval, a gentlemanly looking man in a silk-velvet jacket descended the stairs and entered the parlor.

Instantly the latter's eyes fell upon the newcomer, whom he approached and addressed.

The man at the door had returned the card of introduction to the detective as he entered, and the latter at once presented it to the man in the velvet coat.

The result was an immediate and cordial greeting, and a request to make himself perfectly at home, supplemented with an invitation to accept a glass of wine from the hands of a stylish mulatto who cavalierly officiated at an elegant sideboard in the rear room.

The detective complied, and after a few moments' pleasant conversation, was left to himself, as the man in the velvet coat was called away to receive another gentleman who had just entered.

Presently the detective lounged upstairs and sauntered into a room where a game of "faro" was in progress, and where bets were laid of such magnitude as would have turned the heads of ordinary gamblers.

Standing behind the cashier, and intently watching the game, was Balfour Nolen, the desperate man whom the Irish Detective was shadowing.

The detective had been standing for some time watching the game before the boss thief chanced to raise his eyes and observe his presence.

The moment he did a peculiar expression settled upon Balfour Nolen's face, as he fastened his wicked gray eyes upon the seeming countryman.

The instant Balfour Nolen's first glance had rested upon the Irish Detective, he knew that the latter was not what he seemed, but a man in disguise who was playing a part.

An hour passed by; during that time every movement of the detective's had been followed by the keen glance of the boss thief.

At length, when the proprietor of the resort entered the room, Balfour Nolen called him one side, and inquired, in an indifferent manner, as he indicated the detective:

"Who is that chap?"

"A sporting merchant from Philadelphia."

"He don't look like a merchant; he looks more like a canaler from up country."

"Probably the old chap slipped on a disguise to avoid recognition; he brought me a card of introduction from Murhend."

While the above conversation was in progress, the detective had wandered into another room, and was watching a game of "roulette," when suddenly he felt a hand placed upon his shoulder.

Turning quickly, he found himself facing Balfour Nolen.

"Excuse me," said the latter, as the two men eyed each other keenly, "but Kling tells me you're from Philadelphia."

"Yea," replied the detective.

"You're a friend of Murhend's, I believe?"

"Well, in a way, yes."

"Dick's a great friend of mine."

"Nice man."

"Yes; I haven't seen him for some time. I would like to make a few inquiries about the old boy. Would you have any objection to walking upstairs and have a little smoke with me, and a talk over old friends in Philadelphia?"

"I don't mind."

Balfour Nolen led the way upstairs to a rear back room, and after the detective had passed in, the boss thief closed the door, and took a seat at a green-covered table, directly opposite one just taken by Connors.

After they were seated, Nolen produced a couple of fine regalias, and handing one to the detective, mentioned the names of several Philadelphia sporting men, and inquired if the former was acquainted with any of them.

"I know them all," replied Connors.

"I see you're in disguise?"

"Well, yes; I didn't want to be recognized by any of the gentlemen that I do business with in New York."

"You're very well 'got up.' "

"Do ye think so?"

"Yes; so well got up that I didn't recognize you, nor you me."

"Why, have we met before?"

"Why, you ought to know, Knowles, unless you've disguised yourself out of your own recognition."

"Probably it's the other Knowles that you're acquainted with," said the detective, coolly.

"Probably," replied Nolen, as he suddenly drew his hand from his pocket, and pointing a cocked pistol at the detective, added, "Which Knowles are you?"

"This one," replied the Irish Detective, as with a movement, quick as lightning, he caught Nolen's wrist, and turning the muzzle of the pistol aside, drew a bowie-knife, which he held aimed at Nolen's throat.

The Irish Detective would not have caught Balfour Nolen by the wrists so readily had not the latter calculated upon frightening the detective when he presented his pistol.

As it was, he recognized instantly that he had lost a point, and with the desperate coolness characteristic of him, he said:

"I give it up, old man; I was just throwing out a 'feeler.' "

"So was I," replied the detective, as he restored the bowie-knife to a sheath under his coat, and settled back in his seat.

Nolen also covered his pistol, and for a few seconds an awkward silence followed the startling demonstration above described.

At length Nolen burst into a laugh, and said:

"Well, 'pal,' we've made a good start for long acquaintance!"

"Well, yes; our introduction was a little out of the common order."

"Honor bright, chummy, did you know me when you glistered that knife over my gizzard?"

"I don't know you now; but I reckon you might turn out a thorough-bred upon a more intimate acquaintance."

"Did you ever hear of Balf Nolen?"

"By Heaven!" exclaimed the Irish Detective, starting from his seat, and simulating a startled and terrified appearance.

A gratified smile played over the wicked features of Nolen upon witnessing the terror which the mere mention of his name had created.

"How did you come to run the rôle Knowles, of Philadelphia?"

"Well, you see, I 'wriggled' him for the ticket," and the detective told a well-concocted and probable story, as to how he had got possession of the card of introduction.

"I'll 'float you up,' pal, if you'll stand square."

"Jake Feilman was never known to make any other 'deal' with a 'thorough-bred,' especially such a high-toed 'glider' as Balf Nolen."

"What, chummy, have I the pleasure of meeting Jake Feilman?"

"I'm the lad that stood to have my hair cut when that cognomen was put upon many a prison record."

"I am glad to meet you, my man!" exclaimed Nolen, as he extended his hand, and cordially shook it in the grasp of the other.

We will here state that the name assumed by the Irish Detective was that of a notorious Western desperado, who had been "run down" and "caged" by the Lightning Detective some years previously.

The original Jake Feilman had died in prison under an assumed name, some months previously, and it was the Lightning Detective who suggested to Connors the adoption of the dead thief's name as a safe passport into the confi-

dence of the New York gang, as it was probable that the Western burglar was not personally known to many Eastern thieves.

A long conversation followed, during which the daring and skillful detective, under his assumed character, learned numerous points.

Some time later, Nolen and the detective descended again to the room where the games were going on.

The players at the faro-table had dwindled down to two.

One of these was a slim-built, effeminate-looking man, evidently of a very nervous temperament, and yet a reckless gambler.

The other player was a respectable-looking man, of middle age, who might readily pass for a well-to-do merchant or successful professional gentleman.

The moment Nolen's eyes fell upon the latter, he became visibly excited, and passing a significant signal look to his new-made friend, he moved to a distant part of the room, from whence he could command a view of the two players, without appearing to take any interest in them or their game.

"Do you see that man playing there?" said Nolen, addressing the Irish Detective.

"I see two men playing there," was the strictly Irish reply.

"I mean the older one of the two—the slick-looking gentleman."

"Yes."

That very instant the man of whom they were speaking chanced to turn about, when his eye fell upon Nolen and his companion.

There was nothing extraordinary in his glance, and yet both men gave a sudden start.

Had Nolen observed the movements of his companion, his suspicions would have been aroused; as it was, his attention was too much occupied by the fact that the player's eyes were fastened upon him.

The player resumed his game, while Nolen passed into the rear room, when, turning to the supposed felon, he said:

"Did you chaps out West ever hear of our New York detectives?"

"Yes; I had one of them piping me once for two months."

"What was his name?"

"They called him Old Sleuth."

"Have you got any idea that you're being piped for any racket now?"

"I don't know. Why do you ask?"

"Because that old man bucking the tiger there is Sleuth, the detective, and, by Jupiter! he isn't in here unless he's on some lay."

"He can't be on the lay for me."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm supposed to be dead."

"Well, pal," said Nolen, looking at his watch, "we've got just about time to reach the rendezvous where the gang are to meet to-night, and we mustn't be seen going out of here together. I'll go first, and leave you to watch that old devil and see what he does after I'm out, and I'll wait for you on Broadway."

Passing up to the table where Sleuth and the effeminate man were still playing, Nolen stood for a while and watched the game until the close of the deal, when he afterward slowly sauntered out of the room.

After the departure of Nolen, Sleuth remained for a while longer playing, and then, rising from the table, "tipped a signal" to Fergus Connors, and proceeded upstairs to the same room where the interview had taken place between the Irish Detective and Nolen.

A moment later he was joined by Connors, when he said, interrogatively:

"Well?"

"Tis well," replied the Irish Detective, "so far, I'm to be taken to the rendezvous to-night, but I was left behind a few moments to watch you."

"That's unlucky."

"Why?"

"Because if that pale-faced chap, hanging to the game down-stairs, noticed that you followed me up here, it might make it kind o' hot for you."

"Well, I thought of that, and he didn't see me come up; but who is he?"

"His name is Gasquoine."

"The devil you say?"

"Exactly! and that's what brought me here to-night; I'm shadowing him!"

"He's the nephew, then, of the old man who lost the bonds?"

"That's my calculation."

"Well, I've picked up an item for you; he's acquainted with Nolen."

"That's just the point that I wanted to get at."

"What shall I tell Nolen when I see him? He left me to watch you, you know."

"Tell him that I gave no sign."

A few moments later, the Irish Detective passed from the gambling-house, and at the corner of Broadway met Nolen. The latter's first question was:

"What did you pick up?"

"Nothing."

"All right; we haven't much time to spare."

Half an hour later the Irish Detective was bowing along with Nolen, behind a fast horse, toward that mysterious house described by the Gypsy Detective.

CHAPTER V.

On the banks of the Hudson, about two hours' drive from the city, is situated an old-fashioned farm-house whose garden terminates on the verge of a declivity overlooking the river.

For a long time this house and the grounds attached to it had been permitted to run to ruin, until about two years previous to the opening of the incidents of our story, when it had been purchased by an old Frenchman, who at once put the house in repair and restored the grounds.

The old Frenchman's family consisted of himself, wife, and servant.

The nearest neighbors were an eighth of a mile distant, and as the Frenchman and his family had never sought to cultivate any acquaintances, but little was known about their habits and circumstances.

A mystery appeared to surround the house and its occupants, who, although strictly unneighborly, appeared to have many visitors, seemingly from the city.

It remained for that indefatigable and tireless officer, the Gypsy Detective, to finally discover that the house in question was really a rendezvous of the most dangerous gang of thieves, forgers, and counterfeiters that ever infested the city of New York.

These were the premises alluded to by the Gypsy Detective in his conversation with Sleuth, as being the house he had seen a lady enter, answering to the description of the missing adopted daughter of the old millionaire who had been so mysteriously robbed of his bonds.

It was two hours after midnight, upon the same evening when the Irish Detective had made the acquaintance of Nolen, that two men arrived opposite the gate where it opened from the grounds into the road.

"Here we are," said Nolen, and passing through the gate the men walked along a broad, shrub-skirted path toward the house.

The detective took in the outside surroundings at a glance, and mentally credited the thieves for the ingenuity displayed in the selection of this particular spot.

The house stood back at least four hundred yards from the main road, and was completely hidden from sight by flourishing willow, walnut and poplar trees.

The building itself was one of those old-fashioned, slanting roof, two-story and attic farm-houses, constructed of uncult, common stone.

A broad piazza ran entirely around the house, and the most critical observer would have pronounced it the dwelling of some substantial farmer who had been made rich by the rapid rise of land.

No secrecy was observed by Nolen when once within the grounds.

Advancing to the front door, he gave a rap on the old-fashioned brass knocker, and in a few moments the door was opened by a wiry-faced old man, without the exchange of signals or any of the usual precautionary formalities generally exacted at the entrance of suspicious resorts.

Nolen led the way in, and in a second or two later the Irish Detective was ushered into a comfortably furnished and very homelike-looking sitting-room.

"Take a seat," said Nolen. "I'll have to leave you a few moments, old man; your introduction into the house on so slight an acquaintance is a little irregular, and I'll have to consult with one or two of the gang before I introduce you."

"All right," replied the detective: "I've fallen into good luck so far, and I'm ready to take chances with the rest."

Nolen left the room, and it was half an hour before he returned.

When he re-entered, he was followed by two

villainous-looking men whom he introduced by name.

Nolen said:

"Jake, no man becomes a member of this gang until he passes through our initiation; and it's only fair to tell you that it's a simple one, but a man once bound to the oath that makes him a brother, can never go back on it."

The two members of the gang now left the room, leaving the detective alone with Nolen.

Ten minutes passed, when the boss thief said:

"Now, then, Jake, preparations are about completed for making you a member of the brotherhood. It is a simple form we go through, and it's quickly done; follow me!"

Instead of being ushered into the presence of the assembled gang, as he expected, he was shown into a room, plainly furnished, well-lighted, and unoccupied.

Upon the center of the floor stood a small iron stand.

Upon the top of this stand was a glass partly filled with water as clear as crystal, while beside it lay a peculiar instrument with a fine, crooked point, and as sharp as a surgeon's finest lancet.

A chair was stationed within a few feet of the stand, and in this the detective was directed to be seated.

From the time they had left the sitting-room, until the present moment, Nolen had not spoken a word, but after the detective was seated, he said:

"Do you see that glass?"

"Yes, I see it; it would have quite an inviting look if it contained the same quantity of cognac, instead of the water."

"It's pure water, certainly, that you see now—but in a few moments it will be colored with something less palatable than brandy."

The detective's curiosity was excited, and he did a very uncharacteristic thing by asking:

"What will it be colored with?"

"Human blood," was the answer.

A second time the Irish Detective felt a cold chill creeping over his frame.

There was a fearful suggestion contained in this last answer, and yet, without betraying the shock which he had received, he asked:

"Who's going to open a vein?"

"I am, for the first one," replied Nolen, and throwing off his coat, he rolled up his shirt-sleeves, displaying a bare arm; then taking the peculiar instrument lying upon the table beside the tumbler of water, he skillfully made a slight incision, and bending his arm forward allowed one single drop of warm blood to drip into the tumbler.

The Irish Detective's gaze was fixed upon Nolen during the performance of this heathenish ceremony.

As Nolen rolled down his sleeves, and resumed his coat, he said:

"It will cost you your life, Felman, if you move from your seat, or utter one word of protest, until eleven drops of blood, from as many arms, are mingled with the one I have just dropped into that tumbler."

After a few words of peculiar warning, Nolen left the room, and the Irish Detective found himself alone, with his eyes riveted upon that fatal glass.

CHAPTER VI.

FIFTEEN minutes passed, and there the detective sat as though paralyzed.

Suddenly the idea flashed across his mind that there might still be a chance for him to escape.

He glanced about the room, and his eye fell upon a window, barred by an iron shutter.

He was about rising to his feet to make a more thorough examination of the fastenings of the iron shutter, when the door opened, and a man in his shirt sleeves entered the room.

The man advanced straight to the stand upon which the glass of water had been placed, and baring his arm, took up the little steel instrument and made a puncture in a minor vein, from which he dripped one single drop of blood in the tumbler, in the same manner as Nolen had done.

The last member of the gang to enter was a wick-d-eyed, shaved-headed rascal.

"This is a high-daddy drink we're mixing for you, 'cull,' you won't give no 'pal' away after you've taken an oath on the top of this concoction."

"See here, 'dago,' after I'm once in this brotherhood, it strikes me I'll play elder brother

to you just once! I'll whale you for your own good, as I would a chap who's got no pop."

The grin grew broader upon the thief's face, as he said:

"This dose is goin' to go agin you," and then, dropping his voice to a whisper, he added, as he tapped the tumbler with the point of the lance:

"How will you have the conscience to 'pipe a skid' after you're drunk that?"

If a good sized torpedo had suddenly exploded under the Irish Detective's chair, it could not have caused him a greater shock than did the startling words of that cunning faced rascal, who, after uttering them went through the same performance as the others.

There was no mistaking the fellow's words.

He betrayed that he understood the detective's real character, and held his life in his hands.

"You're a hero at guessing," said the detective.

"Yes," and lowering his voice to a still finer whisper, the thief added: "I guessed you was a 'cop' the moment I set my 'peepers' on you."

"Why didn't you give your guess to the gang?"

The thief glanced toward the door, and then leaning across the table toward the detective, said, in a whisper just above his breath:

"Because I thought an oath takin' on top of this dose would sit so nice and snug on the *Irish Detective's* conscience!"

The last syllable had hardly fallen from the thief's lips, when the muzzle of a pistol protruded just above the level of the table, at an angle so that it covered the fellow's heart, while the detective said:

"See here, 'pal,' if you've any secrets that lay heavy on your conscience, just confide them to me, for in less than five seconds your tongue will wag its last music!"

"Go easy, 'cop,'" replied the thief, with the utmost coolness, and without permitting the grin to fade from his features.

It was a fearful moment; a human life hung by a hair.

A most remarkable performance now followed.

By a dexterous movement the thief emptied the contents of the tumbler, rinsed it out with spirits from a vial, and refilled it with a liquid the exact color of that which he had just tossed out.

Having manipulated the glass as described, the thief, with the same leer upon his face as before, said:

"I guess that will be easier to take, 'cop'."

The detective restored his pistol to his pocket and made a certain signal.

To his utter amazement, the signal was promptly answered.

The detective was on the point of speaking in a guarded manner, when the door opened, and the whole gang of thieves, with Nolen at their head, filed into the room.

The men arranged themselves about the room, and each drew a revolver from his pocket.

After each man had drawn and cocked his pistol, and all stood with them leveled, ready to send a dozen bullets at a moment's signal, Nolen said:

"Felman, you are now in the presence of every member of this gang; in that glass is joined a drop of every brother's blood; now, then, my man, all that remains is for you to add one drop more, and then quaff the contents of that tumbler, and by the drink of each man's heart's blood, swear fealty and life and death to the brotherhood. Are you ready to take the oath?"

"I am!" replied the detective.

"Then add your tribute first."

Calmly the detective took up the instrument which had been used by the others, and puncturing a minor vein, permitted one drop of blood to trickle into the glass; then raising the tumbler in his hand, he said:

"I'm ready to be sworn!"

At the conclusion of the ceremony, the men uncocked their pistols and put them up, and each member of the gang came forward and welcomed the supposed Felman as a member of the brotherhood, after which they dispersed.

"It's but two hours from daylight," remarked Nolen, "and as there's nothing particular going on, Frenchy will show you a room where you can lay off for a 'snooze,' and tomorrow night you'll be made acquainted with the mysteries of this place."

A few moments after the departure of Nolen, the old Frenchman who had admitted them

some hours before entered the room, and informed the detective that he was ready to show him to his bunk.

His conductor showed him into a large-sized bedroom, in which were four bedsteads, three of which were already occupied.

It was far into the morning when the detective awoke.

Upon raising his head and glancing about the room, he saw that he was alone, the other occupants having gone forth.

As the detective lay there fully awake, his mind reverted to the occurrences of the previous night.

He had noticed before retiring that the mysterious individual who had so deftly changed the glasses, was an occupant of one of the other beds.

The singular action of that individual was a great mystery to the detective.

He could not recollect that he had ever seen the fellow before, and yet it was evident that the chap knew the detective to a dot.

"I'll investigate that fellow!" was the muttered remark of Connors, when suddenly the bedroom door was opened and the very man whom he was thinking about entered the room. "Hello, 'pal,' are you going to snooze the day out?" was the latter's salutation.

"Well, no, I reckon not."

"Well, get down-stairs and try some of Frenchy's coffee and chops, and then take a stroll down the rear garden toward the river-bank."

"See here, my hero," said Connors, "I'd like to have a little private chat with you."

"That's all right, Jake, and after you have got outside of your breakfast, slip down to the river, as I told you; I might take a notion to be there."

While seated at the table, the detective happened to glance through an open door, when, for an instant, he caught a glimpse of an object which caused his heart to give a violent throb.

Standing in the adjoining room, and fully revealed through the open doorway, was a young girl not more than fourteen or fifteen years of age.

In the one brief glance which he had of her, the detective recognized that she was the most ravishingly beautiful creature his eyes had ever upon.

The fact of seeing such a lovely creature in this den, was of itself sufficiently startling, but when he realized that this lovely creature had, by a quiet pantomimic motion, conveyed a signal to him, he began to wonder whether he was not really dreaming.

The purpose of the signal he readily discerned.

From some motive, this mysterious vision of loveliness had warned him, to what was understood in vulgar parlance, to "keep mum."

The instant the girl saw that he had understood her signal, she disappeared.

Without any further incident worthy of note, the detective concluded his breakfast, and after a while sauntered out into the yard and took his way toward the river.

To his surprise, he found the garden most elegantly laid out.

While standing there, enjoying the fragrant odors, he heard a light step along the gravelled path, and turning about found himself face to face with the beautiful girl who had conveyed to him the mysterious warning while at breakfast.

The girl came to a halt, and raising her finger warningly, said:

"I saw it, but I'll be silent!"

After delivering this speech, she turned about and skipped away, singing a lively air, with the blitheness of a child.

"Well, I'll be hanged if I don't think I've dropped into a lunatic asylum, instead of a thieves' rendezvous!" said the Irish Detective, as he watched the departing figure of the girl.

While still thinking over this singular incident, the detective was a second time disturbed by hearing a step, and upon turning, with the expectation of seeing the girl again, he beheld, instead, the villainous face of the bald-headed thief who had invited him to a tryst down by the river.

CHAPTER VII.

"See here," said the detective, "do you know me?"

"Yes."

"Well, who am I?"

"You are Campbell O'Brien, better known as Fergus Connors, the Irish Detective."

"Well, see here, 'cull,' as you know me so well, it's no more than right that I should know who you are."

During the foregoing conversation the two men had descended the bank leading down to the river, and had strolled along to a secluded spot beneath a overhanging rock.

As the detective made the inquiry above quoted, he seated himself upon a boulder, and fastened a keen, penetrating glance upon his companion.

"So you want to know who I am, do you?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do I look like?"

"Like the devil or a toad."

"It ain't the first time I was called a toad; but I say, 'cop,' I know who you are, and that's enough! Now, the question is, you've got into this gang, now, what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, it strikes me that the first thing I ought to do would be to wring your neck, and chuck your body out in the tide there, and let it float down for an inquest."

"Well, that would be a good 'lay,'" replied the thief, coolly; "because I didn't act that way toward you, it's no reason why you should fire me in."

"You did do me a good turn, didn't you?"

"You mean by not 'giving you away' to the gang, as soon as I 'dropped' to you?"

"No; I mean for changing that glass."

"Change it! Why, 'cop,' that was only a dodge."

"And I took that horrible oath!" exclaimed the detective, turning pale.

"You are wedded to the gang, 'cop.' You were fooled! I played you to take away the bad taste, you know; imagination has a good deal to do with a drink of that kind!"

A horrible suspicion flashed over the Irish Detective's mind; he began to think that after all he had been tricked into making that terrible compact with a gang of thieves.

Rage succeeded the first horror, and springing to his feet with a wild oath, he made a dash at the throat of his companion.

The latter was too quick for him.

Bounding to his feet, the thief slipped a pistol from his pocket, and held the detective at bay, with the revolver covering his heart.

"Hold, Connors! I've got something to tell you that will serve your purpose well."

The detective halted, and said:

"Another wink, 'bub,' and I'd have sent a knife between your ribs."

"Then you would have driven your knife into the flesh of a friend."

"Convince me that you are my friend, and I owe you an apology."

"I did change the glasses."

"Will you swear it?"

"I'll swear it!"

"All right; now, then, by the powers, unmask yourself."

With a laugh as merry as a young girl's, the thief said:

"You'll have to throw up the sponge, Connors."

The Irish Detective looked puzzled; suddenly something familiar in the tones of the voice appeared to strike him, and after a moment, he said:

"Look here, comrade. You are the devil, or the Gypsy Detective!"

The supposed thief laughed more merrily than ever, when the Irish Detective exclaimed:

"By heavens! the sponge is up! you're the king in disguises!"

"I laid in a lucky moment for you, Fergus!"

"You did that; but how is it you rung me into this trap, when you had the thing down pat yourself? You're an old stager around these diggings, I reckon?"

"I was never in that house before last night."

"You never was?"

"No, sir."

"Then you got very familiar on a short acquaintance. Please explain your riddle."

"I'm impersonating another man, Connors."

"Then you must be twin-brother to a thief."

"Not exactly; but the original of this character is hanging out in the Tombs at present. Fortunately he was a good subject for me to 'make up' for."

"But you cut a nice pattern in a short time."

"The caged 'cull' was a friend of mine some years ago. I had his habits down fine before I turned the key on him."

"And was it your intention to work this route, when I parted from you last night?"

"Not exactly; chance opened the door, and I stepped in."

"And you've picked up the facts ahead of me?"

"We've struck a mine, sure, but it will take fine play yet to win this game."

"By thunder!" said Connors, after awhile, "I shouldn't be surprised to see Sleuth and Harry Light turn up under that roof."

"Tain't probable, and it wouldn't serve any purpose; but now let's compare notes. What have you seen that's strange and mysterious?"

The Irish Detective related his singular adventure with the mysterious girl.

The Gipsey Detective betrayed considerable excitement while listening to Connors' account, and at its conclusion, said:

"You can't guess to what the girl alluded, can you?"

"I'll be hanged if I can."

"Things are hot, Connors; the meaning of that girl's words is plain enough to me. *She saw me change the glasses.*"

"Ye may well say then, that things are hot," remarked Connors; "for by the powers! if we are once discovered by that gang, it's little time we'll have for our last prayers."

"How old was the girl?"

"I should say she might be fourteen or fifteen."

"What color of hair had she?" asked the Gipsey Detective, in a tone of eager excitement.

"I should say it was the most beautiful auburn I ever beheld."

"And her eyes, what color were they?"

"A heavenly blue."

"Let me see," said the Gipsey, musingly; "it was nine years ago that Barrett Griffin's little daughter was stolen; she was then four years old—nine and four are thirteen."

"I see what you suspect," exclaimed the Irish Detective.

"Yes, it is just possible that that lovely girl may prove to be the Lightning Detective's long-lost child."

At that moment both detectives were startled as a fragment of stone rattled down the side of the cliff overhead, and dropped in the soft sand at their feet.

Both glanced upward, but failed to recognize the presence of any one above them.

"Go you that way, and I'll go this," said the Irish Detective, "and we'll meet at the cliff above there; if it's a friend we find we'll give him the hand; if a listening enemy, the knife."

The quick reasoning of the two detectives was betrayed by the fact that they looked upon the fall of the fragment of rock as a possible signal from a friend.

A few minutes subsequent to their parting under the cliff, they met at a point on the top of the cliff overhanging the spot where they had previously been standing.

"Did you see any signs of any one?" asked the Irish Detective.

"No; did you?"

"I did not."

The gipsey dropped upon his hands and knees, and crawled around like an Indian hunting for the slightest indication of a trail.

Presently he came to an old stump that had been worn down nearly level to the very surface of the earth; within the hollow of this stump had accumulated the powdered crumbings of decayed wood, and right in the center was a distinct imprint of human feet.

"Just as I thought," said the gipsey, rising to his feet.

"What have you discovered?" asked the Irish Detective.

"Look at that," replied the gipsey, pointing to the imprint of two feet.

"By George!" exclaimed the Irish Detective, "that solves that mystery."

"I think it but begins it," replied the gipsey.

"Well, what are we to do about it?"

"We must secure that girl before we trust ourselves into the rendezvous to-night."

"Well, she's easily secured," said the Irish Detective, as he darted away suddenly.

Upon the instant the gipsey was surprised at this sudden movement of his companion, but as he turned to look after him, the Irish Detective's motive was explained.

He saw scuttling across a piece of open ground the figure of a girl, with Connors at her heels.

While speaking with the Gipsey Detective, Connors had detected the form of the girl stealing slyly through the brush, and had at once darted after her.

The instant the child discovered that she had

been observed, she rose to her feet and sped away; but her pursuer was too quick for her, and ere she had passed half the distance and crossed the open space, the detective had grasped her.

"See here, my little maiden," said Connors, "I can run faster than you can, and I've caught you."

"I ain't afraid," said the child.

"Well, I'm very glad to hear you say that; and as you ain't afraid, I want you to come back to the place that you just ran away from."

"What do you want me to go back there for?"

"I want to ask you some pretty little questions."

"I don't want to go back there."

"Why not, my little maiden?"

"Because that bad man is there."

"What bad man?"

"The one you were talking to, a few minutes ago, under the cliff."

"How do you know that I ain't a bad man?" asked the detective, curiously.

"I don't think you are."

"Why is it that you think so well of me?"

"I don't know, but somehow I thought that you might help me to escape."

"Escape? Who from?"

"The man who says he is my father."

"Well, isn't he your father?"

"No."

"What makes you think so?"

"I can't tell you now; maybe I will, some time; but will you take me away from here?"

"Maybe I will; but now tell me, my little girl, what did you mean when you said, this morning, 'I saw it'?"

"I'll tell you what I meant. My bedroom is right over the place where you were last night when those men came into the room and put those horrid drops into that glass."

"Well, and did you see them do it?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how you came to see it?"

"There is a hole in the floor, and I peeped through."

"And you saw that man change the glasses?"

"Yes."

"How did you come to know there was any importance attached to that movement?"

"Because I've often heard the man who says he is my father talking with other men, and—"

Here she suddenly ceased speaking, and shading her eyes with her hand, glanced toward the house.

"What's the matter, child?" asked the Irish Detective, surprised by the singular movement.

"Hide! hide quick!" said the girl, excitedly.

"Why shall I hide?"

"Because there is the man who claims to be my father. He must not see me talking with you!"

CHAPTER VIII.

As the child pointed to the figure of a man standing on the rear piazza of the house, the detective said:

"I do not wish to lose sight of you yet."

"Why not?" asked the girl as she crouched down, so that there would be less chance of her discovery.

"I will tell you why not, my child. If that man is not your father, I will certainly help you to escape from him; on that you may rely."

The man upon the piazza stepped down into the yard attached to the house, when the child exclaimed:

"Oh, I must fly!"

"Go and hide in the bushes," said the detective.

Almost bent double, the girl stole away toward the spot where the Gipsey Detective was standing, on the verge of the cliff.

The moment the latter's eyes fell upon the child an exclamation of delight burst from his lips, followed by the remark:

"By Jupiter! it's Harry Light's child!"

The girl did not observe Tremaine until she was right upon him, when she uttered a slight scream of terror.

"Hush, child! you have no reason to fear me," said the gipsey.

At this Connors, the Irish Detective, drew near.

The girl ran toward the latter, and with an instinctive shudder kept her eyes fastened upon the gipsey.

"I wish to question this girl," said Connors.

"Go and keep off the chaps that is loitering in the garden, Phil."

The Gipsey Detective immediately understood what was required of him, and moved away; but instantly he glided back with the information that the man was coming directly toward the point where they were.

"He must have seen me!" exclaimed the girl.

"I must fly!"

"One moment," said the Irish Detective, quietly, "have you spoken one word to anybody concerning me, or what you saw?"

"Not a word."

"That's right; do not, and you will find me your friend."

"I understand," said the girl, and she darted away like a young fawn.

A moment or two after the disappearance of the girl, the man whom the Irish Detective had seen standing upon the piazza, approached them.

As he drew near he said, in a quick, sharp manner:

"What was that child chattering about?"

"Well, that's about all she did do, was to chatter."

"Yes, she's quite a chatter-box; but I'll see you again, pal," and the man, whose name was Blacklin, turned on his heel and walked away, without another word.

For over an hour the two detectives remained in conversation, and after weighing all the chances, finally decided upon a course of action which proved the wonderful daring and courage of both men.

No further incident of any especial interest to the reader occurred until after nightfall, when, after a hearty supper, in company with Nolen and several other members of the "gang," including Blacklin, it was proposed by the latter that they should proceed at once to business.

"All right!" said Nolen, "to business it is!" and rising from his seat, he left the room, followed by the others.

Leading the way to the hall, he passed up the stairs to the attic-way, and ascended an ordinary step-ladder.

A moment later the detectives were masters of the great mysteries of that rendezvous, and were compelled to mentally yield homage to the ingenuity of the projectors of the secret meeting-room.

The attic was an ordinary one, through one end of which ran the bare brick walls of what, seemingly, was an ordinary chimney.

The most experienced mechanic could not have detected anything but the bare brick walls; and yet, going to the chimney and thrusting his hand close to the weather boarding of the house, Nolen succeeded, after a moment, in actually swinging open a portion of one side of the chimney, disclosing a passage-way right down the flue.

A more ingenious piece of mechanism for the concealment of a secret passage was never constructed.

The two astonished detectives were subsequently compelled to admit that the whole detective force of the city could never have possibly discovered the secret, unless by some accident a portion of the chimney wall had been demolished.

Following Nolen, they descended an iron ladder, at least between thirty and forty feet in length, and shortly found themselves in a subterranean apartment, apparently excavated out of a bed of solid rock.

A meaning glance passed between the Irish and Gipsey detectives, as the thought simultaneously flashed over both their minds that, verily, discovery in this place was death, and that a dying shriek or groan could not be heard a dozen feet distant.

The secret rock-bound chamber was at least twenty feet long, and sixteen in width.

A table occupied the center of the stone floor, and a dozen comfortable chairs were conveniently arranged around it.

In different parts of the room, systematically arranged, was every description of burglars' tools.

Ingenuous appliances, which must have cost thousands of dollars, hung upon the walls; also masks and weapons of every description.

But a few moments passed before the detectives became aware, also, that, although Nolen was the ostensible head of the gang, the real executive captain and leader was the scurvy villain, Blacklin.

The latter had not spoken to nor even noticed the two detectives since the moment he had held the brief conversation with them upon the cliff.

by the river, although upon several occasions he had been brought in close contact with them—at the supper-table having sat directly next to the Irish Detective and opposite the gypsy.

There were but six of the gang present besides the two detectives, and during the brief moments before the opening of the business of the thieves, both the Gypsy and Irish detectives were, unknown to each other, studying the chances of a life-and-death struggle of two against six, in that stone-bound cave, whose walls would not permit one sound to pass them.

Without a word the thieves drew up their chairs to the table in as orderly and decorous a manner as though they were bank directors, about to discuss some great financial scheme, instead of being thieves, determined to discuss a plan to rob a bank.

Nolen occupied a chair at the head of the table, while next to him, upon the right, sat Blacklin.

When all were seated, Nolen, in a formal manner, stated what progress had been made in a scheme that had been under way for some time for the robbery of a prominent bank.

He was unreserved in giving the whole details, stating how they had hired a building adjacent to the bank, and had undermined a passage to the vaults.

Nolen having concluded his statement, the point presented for immediate consideration was the selection of the members of the gang who were to execute the final robbery.

"I have something to say, 'pals,'" abruptly remarked Blacklin, in the sharp, peremptory manner peculiar to him.

Instantly he received the attention of the others.

"We're the object of special attention, lads, just at present!"

The interest of his auditors now became intense, as the speaker added:

"Some of the gang have been 'piped' to the rendezvous!"

This information was received with fierce oaths and ejaculations of vengeance.

Blacklin waited until the first excitement had somewhat subsided, when he remarked, in tones of startling significance:

"I suppose every man present here has taken the oath, and is a brother?"

"That's a strange question," said Nolen, "for you to ask, Blacklin."

"Why?"

"Because you know very well it would be death to any man to be found here who hadn't taken the oath."

"Yes, that's so; still, there are facts in the possession of four men, concerning certain transactions that have taken place under this roof. Now, then, the question is, Has a bird conveyed this information, or have we had a traitor among us?"

"A traitor!" exclaimed several, fiercely.

The two detectives involuntarily exchanged glances; both felt that some startling disclosure was to be made.

The curses and terrible blasphemy that fell from the lips of those men at the mention of the word "traitor," could only roll from the tongues of such as they.

"It's impossible that any of the gang could have proved a traitor!" said Nolen.

"Well, we'll 'sling' that idea for the present, and I'll go on with my story. You've all heard of the Gypsy Detective?"

"Yes," came the unanimous and hearty answer.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN this startling question was asked at such a moment, in such a place, and among such a gang of desperate men, one would suppose that the Gypsy Detective's hair would have stood right up.

On the contrary, that wonderful man never more strikingly discovered what a faithful friend he could be, and what a dangerous foe.

When the fearful question came, he was the first to cry:

"Yes, yes," and drawing his pistol, flourished it meaningly, as though he would like to blow the top of that Gypsy Detective's head right off.

Again, when the confusion had subsided, Blacklin resumed, and said:

"That gypsy's the chap that 'piped' our rendezvous. I shouldn't be surprised sometime to find him right here—right with us, picking up points."

"How do you know that he has 'dropped' to us?"

"I've got that part of the business 'dead to rights,'"

"What 'lay' is he working on?"

This last question came plumb from the Gypsy Detective himself.

Blacklin looked the inquirer straight in the eye, and answered:

"If I had the assistance of the devil, the same as he has, I might tell you; he's old Pinto's pet imp, or he wouldn't have 'skinned through' as often as he has; but he may drop into a boiling pot yet."

"Yes," he continued, "the Gypsy Detective is the man that 'piped' this place; but that ain't the worst of it; there's a combination formed against us, and the business that we've got in hands is to cut the throats of the four men who have laid themselves out to bring us one and all to the gallows."

"Who are the four men?" came the inquiry.

"You've heard of Old Sleuth, I suppose, lads; the 'cop' that used to be on the force, and who 'worked up' a big mystery, recovered a fortune for a girl, and married her."

"Yes, we've heard of him!" was the response.

"Well, Sleuth is in harness again! He is the brains of the combination against us."

"Who's clubbed in with Sleuth against us?"

"Well, there's another old 'cop' who has been out of the business for a number of years, who has put on his harness again to join this combination against us."

"Who is he?"

"They used to call him the Irish Detective."

"Fergus Connors!" was the unanimous exclamation.

"That's the man. Sleuth and the Irish Detective are number one and two of this combination, and number three is a man whom I had some dealings with before, and a gamer 'cop' never set out in the service of the law."

"Who is he?"

"A man well known in the West; a desperate devil, who broke up one of the best gangs that ever started out to make an honest fortune."

"You don't mean the Lightning Detective?" asked Nolen, eagerly.

"That's the man, and no other."

"Have these 'cops' dropped to the scheme we have in hand?"

"Not unless they have picked it up within the last twenty-four hours."

As Blacklin spoke he fastened his fierce eyes in a fixed glance upon the Gypsy Detective.

He was met by a glance as defiant as his own was significant.

"You say we've been 'piped' to this rendezvous?"

"Yes."

"Look here, 'pals,' can't we beat those detectives at their own game?"

"How?"

"By letting them in here, the whole four at once!"

The gang of thieves exchanged meaning glances, as Nolen added, while the true nature of the man shone in his villainous features:

"This cave would be a snug hole if we had the skeletons of those four detectives harmlessly dangling, one in each corner."

An hour passed, during which the fact of the combination of the four detectives was fully discussed; also, the further details of the intended bank robbery.

It was finally decided not to select the men for the final carrying out of the robbery until the following night, when it was hoped that the whole "gang" would be assembled.

This matter being settled, Nolen suggested that the party adjourn.

They were all cautioned to be very careful in their movements, until some plan was decided upon for entrapping Sleuth and his companions. The party then started to go toward the iron ladder leading up through the chimney.

Nolen had held a few moments' conversation with the Irish Detective, whom he still supposed to be Felman, and thus it was, that in ascending the ladder, Nolen went first, and the detective followed immediately after him.

It happened, also, that the Gypsy Detective came last, being immediately preceded by Blacklin.

The latter put one foot on the bottom rung of the iron stairway, and kept his position until the others had ascended, when he called up:

"Close the trap! I want to talk over a little 'racket' with Toad!" and turning toward

the Gypsy Detective, he added: "That's all right, ain't it?"

"That's all right," replied the Gypsy.

The ladder-way was separated from the main cavern, and when the Gypsy Detective and Blacklin returned into the large room, the latter pushed to the iron door separating the two apartments, and locked it.

"The devil himself can't get in here now, unless we choose to let him!" he remarked, as he threw himself in a chair at the table, and motioned the Gypsy Detective to take an opposite seat.

When the Gypsy Detective was seated, Blacklin said, abruptly:

"I've saved your life to-night, 'pal!'"

"I don't think I'm under any obligations to you," replied the gypsy.

"You don't, eh?"

"No."

"There's one thing certain—Toad can't be in two places at the same time."

"That's sure!"

"Well, if Toad's in the Tombs, he can't be sitting here with me at this moment."

"Well, as you know I ain't Toad, you ought to know who the devil I am!"

"I suspect you're the Gypsy Detective."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because no other 'cop' would have the game to crawl into the lion's jaw the way that you have."

"Well, suppose I am the Gypsy Detective—what of it?"

"I'll tell you what of it!" exclaimed Blacklin, as he suddenly drew his hand from under the table with a cocked pistol in it, which he aimed point-blank at the detective's heart.

Blacklin's words were checked just there, for quick as he was, he was matched by the detective, who had a pistol leveled point-blank as quick as himself; and there the two men sat, muzzle to muzzle, eye to eye, both desperate and determined.

"Go on! What of it?" repeated the Gypsy.

Blacklin saw that he was matched, but did not flinch, and with his glance still fastened upon the gypsy, he said:

"You will never leave this cave alive, only on certain conditions."

"You are at liberty to make any proposition that you choose."

"All right. And now, to begin with, what 'lay' are you on?"

"I am running a child thief to earth, and I think that I have caught him in his burrow!"

CHAPTER X.

"THAT'S just exactly what I thought!" said Blacklin.

"And you're just the person who would be most apt to think so," retorted the Gypsy.

"So you was 'buzzing' the girl with a purpose!"

"Have it so if you like; and now, as you appear to know me so well, it's no more than right that I should tell you that you also are recognized."

During the foregoing conversation, the two desperate men had remained in the same position, with their pistols aimed at each other, point-blank across the table.

The gypsy had his left hand above the table, while Blacklin's rested in his lap, beneath it.

This was their position, when in answer to the gypsy's statement, Blacklin said, deliberately and in low, distinct tones,

"So you recognize me, do you?"

"Yes."

"Who am I?"

"One of the greatest scoundrels unhung!"

"That's descriptive, but not positive; there are a great many scoundrels unhung—you are one of them—but which one am I?"

"You are Alteo!"

This name but just fell from the gypsy's lips, when the report of a pistol resounded through the cave, followed by the crash of broken glass and utter darkness, and immediately after by the instantaneous flashes of two other pistols, and but one report.

Before proceeding to relate the details of the thrilling and terrible scene which followed, we will explain the startling *dénouement* above described.

Our readers will recollect that Blacklin, or Alteo, as the gypsy had denounced him, had held one hand under the table.

In this hand he held a pistol, and at the moment the denunciation came, without raising

the weapon above the level of the table, he had aimed at the swinging lamp, firing, and shattering it to pieces.

At the same instant both men had discharged their pistols, but without fatal results. So perfect was the experience and nerve of both, that as they fired they dodged.

They were now in total darkness, and in that gloomy cavern began a duel between these two desperate men.

Full half an hour passed, and still this fearful dodging about in the darkness continued.

To speak, or even breathe hard, was almost certain death.

Finally both became conscious, almost as though by a supernatural premonition, of the exact position of the other, and a simultaneous flash and a report was the result.

The gypsy felt a sensation along the side of his head, as though he had been scored by a red-hot iron, and the dripping of warm blood upon his face warned him that he had been hit.

Still not the slightest exclamation fell from his lips, but on the contrary, dropping upon the floor, he fired his pistol, aiming two or three feet to the right of where he had seen his opponent by the flash of his weapon.

This last shot had been fired on a chance.

As no cry indicated a fatal result, he was forced to the conclusion that he had guessed wrong.

At this moment the gypsy betrayed once again his wonderful nerve and courage by purposefully betraying his position.

The betrayal was followed by a shot, when the detective uttered a cry of pain, and dropped upon the stone floor of the cave.

His exclamation was followed by another shot; the tally of death now standing five shots for Alteo and four for the detective.

Again an interval of terrible silence followed, when a second time the detective revealed his position; but this time Alteo did not fire; he had dropped to the fact that the detective's exclamation was a "ruse," and that the gypsy was taking desperate chances for the final advantage.

For full ten minutes this desperate game continued, when suddenly the detective thought to catch Alteo, and hazarded everything upon one shot.

His success was announced by a triumphant laugh from Alteo, who was still unhurt, and held the last charge.

The gypsy realized the chances against him, but was not quite prepared to give up the battle yet.

He moved stealthily around, until by his keen sense he discovered that he and his foe were standing opposite each other on either side of the table occupying the center of the cave.

Poising himself for a spring, he made a clean leap in the dark across the table, landing plump against Alteo.

The latter had been prepared for the bowie knife business, and had drawn his own blade.

The instant the gypsy closed with him, Alteo's pistol became useless.

He dropped it from his hand, and striking upon the floor, the weapon harmlessly exploded.

Instantly the real combat commenced.

Not a word fell from the lips of either; no sound broke the stillness save the hard breathing of the two combatants.

So fearful was the contest that their breathing became labored, perspiration streamed from both, and the victory depended entirely upon which possessed the greatest endurance.

At length, after the struggle had lasted three-quarters of an hour, an accident brought it to a bloody termination.

In their struggles they knocked over a chair, which fell between them, and both, by a wonderful coincidence, being tripped at the same instant, fell with terrific force against the stone wall of the cavern.

A moment of fearful silence followed, broken at length by the feeble voice of the Gypsy Detective, who said:

"Do you give it up?"

There came no response; the inquiry fell upon ears which heard not.

The gypsy rose to his knees, and with his knife still poised, ready for a thrust, reached forward with his disengaged hand to feel for his antagonist.

Then he discovered that the other's weapon had been dropped and that the victory had been won.

At what cost he could not determine, until the excitement which had animated him subsided.

A dizziness came over him, and in sheer exhaustion he sank upon the floor beside the body of Alteo.

At first he thought that he would faint from loss of blood, but an effort of his strong will preserved him from sinking into unconsciousness.

After lying still for about ten minutes, he thought himself of the necessity of escaping.

Finally he mustered sufficient strength to rise to his feet, and staggering across the cavern, groped around to find the door leading to the iron ladder.

He found the door at length, but after trying for some time, failed to discover any mode of opening it.

Turning away and groping until he found a chair, he sat down, muttering grimly:

"When that door is opened, they'll find two corpses here instead of one!"

At this instant he was startled by hearing a groan.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "there ain't one corpse here yet!"

Staggering over to the spot where Alteo lay, he said:

"Are you conscious?"

He received no reply. Kneeling beside Alteo, he bent his cheek down to see if the man breathed.

He was forced to the conclusion that Alteo's last breath had departed with the groan which he had heard.

Again he rose to his feet, when he recollects having seen a masked lantern hanging against the wall.

The idea flashed over his mind that he might possibly obtain light, and he commenced feeling around against the wall, in hopes of finding the lantern.

While moving around, with his hand gliding over the cold stones, he felt a slight draught blow upon it.

This incident appeared to imbue him with new strength.

Continuing his investigations, he discovered that he was in that corner of the cavern where he had noticed, before the extinguishment of the light, an open, shallow closet in which most of the burglars' tools were hung.

While feeling and reaching around he discovered that this closet was movable.

Loss of blood had weakened him considerably, still, by dint of extraordinary exertion, he managed to move the closet a trifle from the wall, when through the aperture there came a strong current of damp air.

This discovery thrilled him with delight, and though unable to move the closet further, he succeeded finally in toppling it over.

Down it went with a crash, when the gypsy stepped upon it and felt for the wall against which it had been apparently standing.

As he reached forward he found his hands swinging in space, instead of against a rock wall.

Then, for the first time, the idea of a secret passage flashed over his mind.

Cautiously he moved forward, and after proceeding a few steps was convinced that he was in a crevice through the solid rock, at least, if not in a passage-way.

"Oh, for a light!" was the wish that animated his heart.

Again he recollects about the masked lantern.

Returning within the cave he recommenced his search, and, after long and persistent groping, with thrill of delight, found what he was looking for, and what was more fortunate, several wax matches adhering to the rim.

The matches proved to be sound, and with little difficulty he managed to ignite the wick of the lantern.

Having secured a light he made another effort, by the aid of its rays, to find the secret spring of the iron door.

Despite his light he was again baffled, and a second time gave up the effort in despair.

He was now convinced that all chance for egress through the iron door was gone, and with a despairing sigh he turned away.

He had but little hopes of the secret passage, as he felt assured that if there had been any mode of egress through that channel, he would have got some inkling of the fact from the gang.

Before commencing his explorations, he moved around, and flashed the ray of his light upon the face of Alteo.

The spectacle which met his gaze was the most ghastly he had ever beheld.

His late foe's eyes were wide open, and glared horribly, but it was not the glare of death.

The gypsy advanced nearer, and discovered that consciousness had returned to the wounded man.

Kneeling beside him, he asked:

"Is there anything you wish to say?"

CHAPTER XI.

"Yes," feebly replied Alteo.

"To whom?"

"The Lightning Detective."

"I am listening. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him that, dead or alive, Alteo's vengeance shall still follow him!"

"You're a fool!" exclaimed the gypsy, involuntarily. "When your breath leaves your body your vengeance ceases."

"With my life the secret of his daughter perishes also."

"That secret has already been disclosed."

"You think the girl you saw yesterday was his child, don't you?"

"I know it!" was the reply.

"Well, what then?"

"She will be restored to her father!"

"Never, this side of the grave!"

The effort required to carry on the foregoing conversation was too much for the wounded man, and a second time he sunk to unconsciousness.

The gypsy had no restoratives at hand, and, although he regretted the necessity for leaving Alteo, still, his own safety demanded that he should make his escape.

Taking his lantern, the gypsy entered the narrow passage-way leading from the cavern.

Cautiously he moved along, at intervals being compelled to squeeze through crevices so narrow that the jagged edges of the walls sadly bruised him.

As our readers are aware, the gypsy was a man of slender build, and yet it was with the greatest difficulty that he managed to squeeze through, and after advancing about twenty feet, his own progress was checked, as the passage became so narrow that it was but a mere crack.

"That settles the bill," murmured the gypsy; "there's no passage out this way! and I might as well return and make up my mind to be discovered and pay the penalty of traitor to the gang, when the scoundrels will have one skeleton at least to decorate with."

He started to return to the cave and had proceeded about half-way, when, after forcing him self past a jutting rock, he was drawing his lantern after him, when a flash of light discovered a ledge above him, where the crevice appeared to be much wider.

Without any idea of finding a passage, he worked his way upon this ledge, impelled more by curiosity than hope.

In his weak state it required quite an effort to work his way up; but once successful, he found the crevice broad enough for him to sit down and rest.

After recovering his breath, he flashed his light around, and at length discovered quite a large aperture, which apparently was the entrance either to another cave, or a broader passage.

Crawling through, he discovered that it was the latter.

He was able to stand upright, and the crevice was quite broad.

He moved along quite readily, and again became cheered with the hope that he would find an outlet, when suddenly he tripped upon some round object, and fell headlong with some force.

As he fell a peculiar rattling sound fell upon his ear which filled his heart with horror.

Fortunately, in his fall his lantern was not broken.

Rising to his feet, he flashed the rays of the lantern upon the floor of the passage, when he discovered, with an exclamation of horror, that he had fallen headlong upon the partly decomposed remains of a human being.

Upon recovering from his first shock, he examined the ghastly object more thoroughly, and recognized the fact that the remains were those of a female.

Instantly certain facts flashed across his mind. First came the story of Sleuth, and the missing adopted daughter of the old millionaire, Gasquoin.

Then he recollects his own discovery while "piping" the rendezvous, namely, the entrance of a female answering the description of the missing girl into the house, about the same time that she was said to have disappeared from the home of her adopted father.

The experience of his profession led him at once to form the theory.

He had not the least doubt but that the remains before him were those of the missing girl, and that in that mysterious crevice in the rock he had discovered a clew at the further end of the chain of evidence, which must be traced backward, link by link, until the fearful mystery was solved.

Nothing remained for him now but to continue his explorations in search of an outlet.

Scrambling along, he finally came to a place from whence three passages branched off in different directions.

While standing and considering, he heard a sound that encouraged him greatly—it was the gurgle of a subterranean stream.

"If I can find that water-course," he muttered, "I will find an outlet; the only question is, whether it is large enough to admit of my passage through it."

Guided by the sound of the dripping water, he squeezed his way through one of the crevices, and in a few minutes found himself in sight of a tiny subterranean water fall.

Following this water-course, he proceeded along quite cheerfully, until he noticed that the passage grew smaller and smaller.

Finally, he was compelled to drop upon his hands and knees and crawl forward.

In this position he advanced some distance, until at length the passage became so contracted that he had to lay himself at full length, taking his lantern in his teeth, and drawing himself forward with his hands.

After crawling in this painful position a yard or two, he began again to feel discouraged, fearing lest the passage should become impassable.

In his eagerness to find an outlet, he kept moving forward without considering what chances there were to make his way backward in case his desire to find an outlet should prove a failure.

Suddenly this idea suggested itself, and he attempted to move backward, when to his horror he discovered that it was an impossibility, unless he had been able to draw himself backward by bracing his toes against the jagged bed of the stream.

The first agonies of the possibilities of the position would have bereft almost any person of his reason instantly, and yet this wonderful man, even at that moment, calculated every chance.

He still labored forward, gaining only by inches, when, while taking a moment's rest from the terrible exertion, the lantern fell from his lips, and was instantly extinguished by the water.

Darkness was now added to the other horrors of his position.

Suddenly, while straining his eyes forward for an instant, he caught a glimpse of light which, like a meteor, appeared to flash before his eyes.

Then came sound.

Hope sprung anew in his heart; the sound he recognized as the peculiar beating of steam-boat wheels upon the water.

With renewed energy he drew himself forward.

Half an hour of fearful straining and soul-racking anxiety passed.

The passage became wider; he was enabled once again to get upon his hands and knees, and with a bounding heart, a moment later he crawled through an opening on a level with the beach, and the stars twinkled above him—he was free!

His escape from a fearful peril filled his heart with joy, and yet, so gallant was his disposition that even at that moment he did not forget the poor wounded toe whom he had left bleeding and unconscious in the secret cavern from whence he had so miraculously escaped.

He determined to notify the Frenchman in some manner, so that succor would be carried to Alceo.

He quickly discovered that he had made his exit under the cliff, which formed a rear wall to the garden of the rendezvous.

Ascending to the garden, he was making his way toward the house, around which all reposed still and quiet under the starlight, when suddenly he heard the report of a pistol within the house.

The Gypsy Detective dashed straight toward the rear end of the house, and had almost reached the back piazza, when the rear door flew open, and a man, bare-headed and in his shirt-sleeves, dashed forth.

By the outlines of his form, the gypsy instantly recognized him as Connors.

At the same instant several pistol-flashes illuminated the door-way.

As the Irish Detective leaped from the piazza, he turned and fired twice at his assailants, then turning, he discovered the form of the gypsy.

Mistaking the latter for another of the gang, the Irish Detective's arm was raised, his pistol was leveled, his finger was upon the trigger, and a moment later he would have blazed away at his comrade, when the gypsy exclaimed:

"Hold on, Connors! don't shoot!"

The Irish Detective's pistol was instantly lowered, as he asked:

"Is it you, Phil?"

"Yes."

"Thank Heaven, my boy, that you are safe!"

"What's up?" asked the gypsy.

"We're known, and I'm having it hot and heavy."

This conversation passed between the two detectives in a fifth of the time it requires us to record it.

Even while they spoke, they had retreated cautiously, followed by three or four men from the house, although for some reason there had been no shots fired since the last two discharges by Connors.

"Lend me a shooter," said the gypsy.

"Take the pair of them," replied Connors; "ye have eight shots left. I have another pair full of 'marbles'."

A regular skirmish followed.

The two detectives dodged from cover to cover, while the four thieves followed after them, the latter also shielding themselves as they advanced.

Thus pursued, the two detectives finally reached the cover of the clump of trees where they had held the interview with the girl.

Connors was in the advance, with the gypsy close behind him.

Once down upon the beach, the detectives discovered that their pursuers had drawn off.

"I guess there's more than one of them that's got a sore head!" said Connors.

At this instant they discovered a boat moored a few rods from the shore.

"Here, me boy!" cried Connors, as he dashed into the water toward the boat, "here's chance for us!"

Securing the boat, and paddling to the shore, he had but just time to take the Gypsy Detective in and shove off again, when half a dozen men came rushing down the cliff toward them.

"By the powers, we're not off yet," was the Irish Detective's remark, as, rising in the stern of the boat, with a pistol in each hand, he drew a bead on the two foremost of their pursuers.

CHAPTER XII.

SLEUTH's achievements betrayed his great calculative qualities, and not his methods.

He accomplished great results, but did it so quietly that the results only were the testimonies of his successes.

Upon the night when he met the Irish Detective in the gambling saloon, after parting from the latter, he returned to the faro-table and resumed the game, this time taking a seat directly opposite a nervous young man, whom he had intimated was the nephew of the millionaire, Gasquoin.

Sleuth had no special purpose in watching Nolen; he had recognized him, and inspired by habit, had merely casually "piped" his movements.

During his interview with Mr. Gasquoin, the detective had made up his mind at once that the nephew was at the bottom of the robbery, and very probably of the disappearance of the girl Frances also.

It was evident that the parlovers of the bonds had arranged their schemes so as to throw suspicion upon the missing girl.

According to Sleuth's reasoning, that was just where they made their mistake.

We will not attempt to detail the ingenious

and cunning method adopted by Sleuth, whereby in a few hours he not only discovered the residence of Victor Gasquoin, the nephew, but learned considerable of his habits and the haunts he most frequented.

The information conveyed to Sleuth by the Irish Detective, that Gasquoin and Nolen were confederates, somewhat puzzled him, as nothing which he had discovered concerning the character of the nephew indicated that he was a common thief, although he was an inveterate gambler.

This latter fact finally induced him to conclude that as Nolen was also an habitual gambler, he and the young Frenchman were merely faro-bank acquaintances.

Sleuth had entered the gambling-saloon, and had found his man; and, as related, after his interview with the Irish Detective, he resumed play, taking his seat directly opposite Gasquoin.

During the detective's absence from the table, several other players had entered the game, and betting became quite brisk and heavy.

One of Sleuth's methods upon certain occasions was to get in such a position opposite the man he was in pursuit of that would enable him to annoy his intended victim until the latter, through anger, was compelled to open the conversation.

Once seated, Sleuth opened his eye-batteries on young Gasquoin.

Soon the latter naturally raised his eyes and met the glance of the detective fastened upon him.

Thinking it merely accidental attentiveness, Gasquoin dropped his eyes and fastened his attention upon the game; but upon raising them again, after a moment, he discovered that cold, steady gaze of the seeming old man still fastened upon him.

Again he looked away, yet despite his utmost endeavors to fix his attention upon the game, he could not shake off the spell of that steady gaze.

Gasquoin became nervous; he squirmed like a worm upon which had been flashed the burning rays of a sun-glass.

A third time he raised his eyes and discovered that steady glance fixed upon him.

At length, recalling his bets, he thrust his checks into his pockets, and rising from the table, walked into an adjoining room.

Taking up a newspaper, and throwing himself upon a lounge, he finally succeeded in becoming interested in the startling details of a recent mysterious murder.

After perusing every line of the account, he chanced to raise his eyes and glance over the top of the paper, when again he encountered the steady glance of those strange, piercing gray eyes.

He could stand it no longer.

Rising from the lounge, Gasquoin crossed the rooms and boldly confronting his tormentor, said:

"Look here, old man, what are you following me with such an impudent gaze for?"

"Then you think it's impudence, eh?"

"I do."

"Wouldn't it be more wise to learn first why I study your countenance so persistently?"

"Well, answer me, why do you do so?"

"Because I think I have seen your face before."

"That's a very unsatisfactory explanation."

"Would you have me amend it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, frankly, then, I suspect that you are a woman disguised in man's clothes."

Gasquoin's face became alternately white and red, as, trembling with passion, he raised his clinched fist, and exclaimed:

"Instantly withdraw your insulting remark, sir, or I will knock you down."

"My young friend," said Sleuth, with irritating placidity, "put your hand down, and drop your pugilistic attitude, or I will arrest you."

"What authority have you to make an arrest, you scoundrel?"

"This is my authority," replied Sleuth, quietly, as he deliberately turned out the lapel of his vest and displayed a silver shield.

The sight of this badge of authority caused the Frenchman's manner to change instantly.

A look of startled terror succeeded his glance of fury; his face became pale, and his whole manner abject, as he said, humbly:

"You are an officer?"

"Yes, sir, I am a detective officer."

"You have made a mistake. I have done nothing, sir, to invite the attention of a detective."

"You are liable to arrest, madam, from the mere fact of being disguised in male apparel."

"Great heavens! do you think that I am a woman?"

"I know that you are."

"I can convince you in a moment that I am not. You have made a great mistake."

"That won't wash," replied Sleuth, with a quiet smile.

"But, sir, you must believe the evidence of your own eyes?"

"That's the evidence I am relying upon! I met you about two weeks ago, and my observation is so keen, and my memory so good, that I recognized you the moment I saw you seated at that table."

"Saw me two weeks ago?" cried Gasquoine.

"Yes, sir."

"Where, pray?"

Sleuth named the street upon which the residence of the millionaire was located; as he did so, he observed, with his peculiar smile of satisfaction, the startling effect of his words.

"Now I know that you are mistaken! I was never on that street in my life!"

"It won't wash, madam! I tell you that I met you; it was between four and five o'clock; you were dressed in a green alpaca suit, a velvet hat trimmed with a rose; you wore cameo ear-rings and breast-pin; you carried a blue silk parasol; you had a black lace veil; gloves to match your dress, and—"

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Gasquoine, "stop! stop! I know that you are mistaken now. I can prove it."

"No, I am not mistaken."

"I can swear you are! It was impossible for you to see my face—it was covered with three thicknesses of my veil!"

"Oh, it was!" said Sleuth, fairly laughing outright.

The Frenchman could have bitten off his tongue; he saw in an instant that the wily detective had captured him.

The detective now gave an exact description of the woman, or man in woman's clothes, who had been seen by the servant to pass the basement windows and go up the front stoop of the millionaire's house.

As the detective accurately described each article, the Frenchman's face became perfectly livid; at length Sleuth continued, with the remark:

"You are satisfied now that I was not mistaken, are you not?"

The Frenchman made no reply, when Sleuth added:

"Now, then, tell me, which was the disguise—when you were dressed as a woman, or are you in disguise now in male attire?"

"I deny that I was ever dressed in woman's apparel!"

The Frenchman turned about and took one step away, when a firm grasp upon his shoulder caused him to face around again, and the sight of a pair of handcuffs, which the detective dexterously exposed, proved that he was dealing with a man who meant business.

"For what purpose did you disguise yourself in female clothes and enter the house of Mr. Gasquoine?"

"I never dressed myself in female clothes."

"Will you admit that you are Victor Gasquoine?"

"Yes."

"No thanks for the admission; but I will thank you to tell me why you entered your uncle's house in a dress the *façade* of that worn by your cousin, Miss Frances Gasquoine, when she left it."

"I have no cousin Frances Gasquoine, and I did not enter that house in female attire."

"Very well, sir; it's possible I'm mistaken. You will excuse me for seeming impertinence." And rising from his seat, Sleuth walked away as indifferently as though he had only passed the time of day with the Frenchman, instead of hinting at the most fearful charges.

The detective had accomplished his purpose, and passing from the room, descended the stairs to the lower hall, and was about leaving the house, when he met the proprietor.

This was the first time that the owner of the den had observed Sleuth's presence, and his manner showed that he recognized the detective at once.

Motioning to the latter to follow him, the gambler led the way to a private office at the rear of the hall, when closing the door he said:

"Why, Harry, old boy, you've got into hairness again, eh?"

"Yes."

"Which one of my customers are you after?" Sleuth smiled as he asked:

"What kind of a fellow is this man Gasquoine?"

"I know nothing against him."

"Nor I, either," said Sleuth, and he turned and passed through the hall, and out into the street.

A moment after the departure of Sleuth, Gasquoine followed him out, and if ever murder was written on a man's face, it was upon the Frenchman's.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD SLEUTH had become so accustomed to danger, that he was always on the lookout for it.

Before he had proceeded a block and a half, he saw a figure dodging after him, and at once decided that it must be the Frenchman.

Having got his quarry on the scent, Sleuth moved faster, and took a direction that would favor a project he had in view.

Finally, the two men reached a section of the city where none but the most resolute dare go at night.

As Sleuth turned down the narrow street that led into the very heart of the dangerous and pestilential neighborhood, he quickened his pace, and walked at a gait that would have bothered even the great pedestrian, Weston, to maintain.

At length he arrived opposite an alley.

Down this he turned, and disappeared.

The Frenchman had turned the corner just in time to observe this movement, and he now became more cautious and wary.

He came to a halt, after drawing and cocking his pistol, and advancing a few steps, waited full five minutes without moving an inch.

Then, with a still more wary step, he crossed the street, and took a position behind a tumbledown stoop directly opposite to the entrance to the alley-way.

Here the intended murderer waited patiently for full half an hour, when, with an oath, he remarked, under his breath:

"I've missed him this time, but he and I can't live at the same time in New York, and he must die!"

After having thus delivered himself, Gasquoine stole forth from behind the old stoop and moved away.

He had not gone half a square, however, before a dark figure stole after him.

The affair was now reversed.

It was the Frenchman who was being dogged this time, and by a cool-headed, cautious, skillful man, who understood the business.

Gasquoine proceeded directly toward the Williamsburg Ferry, and passing through the gates, walked on board of a boat that had just entered the slip.

A few seconds later, a plainly dressed, vigorous-looking man also passed through the gates, and carelessly walked down upon the boat, and entering the cabin, took a seat directly opposite the Frenchman.

The latter paid no attention to the new-comer, but sat lost in deep thought while the signal bell sounded, and the boat moved from the slip and steamed away up the river toward the Brooklyn landing.

When secured to the bridge in the Brooklyn slip, the Frenchman rose from his seat and sauntered out of the cabin.

As he passed out of one of the swinging doors, the other was drawn open by a veiled female, who passed in.

A veiled female is always an object of interest to a detective, and this one caused Sleuth (for the silent passenger was the detective in another rig) to feel more than ordinary interest.

A singular premonition flashed over his mind that the strange woman was in some way connected with the mystery he had in hand, and yet the idea was really so far fetched that only for a moment did he entertain it, and he at once continued in pursuit of Gasquoine, without giving the woman a further thought.

The Frenchman had not gone far before the detective was again upon his track.

And the latter kept upon it until he had piped his man to a house situated on an obscure street in the suburbs of the city, when, after taking a critical survey of the surroundings, he returned back toward the ferry.

The first news that the detective received caused him to exclaim:

"Great Heavens! what a fool I was! Next time I feel an impulse to follow a person I'll do it."

The news that called for this exclamation was

the information, that half an hour previously a veiled woman had jumped from the ferry-boat into the river, and was drowned.

* * * * *

When Fergus Connors took a position in the stern of the boat, pistols in hand, and ordered the gypsy to man the oars, he knew that his work was about to follow, as among the passengers he recognized Nolen, and was well aware that the latter was a man that had too much at stake to permit them to escape if he could prevent it.

As Nolen rushed down to the shore, he aimed a pistol at the Irish Detective, and shouted:

"Stand, or I fire!"

"The first shot, under these circumstances, is the best," muttered Connors, as he let drive at Nolen.

In the meantime the gypsy had secured the oars, and was rowing away as fast as he could.

In fact, he had made such progress, that the Irish Detective's shot was at too long a range to do any mischief.

"What is that chap has got?" asked the gypsy, as he rested on his oars a moment.

"Faith! it looks like a rifle."

"And that is just what it is," replied the gypsy, laying to again with all his might and main to force the boat out of range of this dangerous weapon.

Nolen took the rifle and drew a bead on them.

"Down with you, my man!" exclaimed Connors, as, suiting the action to the word, he dropped down in the bottom of the boat.

The gypsy also jerked in his oars and lay down at full length.

Neither of them were a moment too soon, as at the very instant that they dropped a rifle ball came whizzing over their heads with that singular noise peculiar to a minie-rifle bullet.

"Now then you have a chance for a few strokes," cried the Irish Detective, "before he loads again!"

The gypsy understood his companion's meaning, and rising in his seat pulled away, and was successful in forcing the boat ahead a few yards, when he saw Nolen raise his rifle for a second shot.

Down dropped the gypsy again, and an instant later a ball came crashing through the thin weather boarding of their boat, and sent the splinters flying in every direction.

"By the powers!" exclaimed Connors, with a laugh, "if they don't board us they'll sink us at that rate, and make a clean job of it."

The gypsy again rose to his seat, and gained a few more strokes, when a third ball came, striking the boat just above the water-line, and the battered piece of lead coming clear through, just grazed the Irish Detective's ear.

"Bad luck to them!" he exclaimed, with an oath, "they'll drown us like a pair of pup-pies!"

"We may have a swim of it, that's certain," remarked the gypsy, with his peculiar quiet smile, much amused in that moment of extreme danger at the remarks of Connors.

Still, as before, he rose up, and propelled his boat a few yards further, but with little hope of getting beyond range of the rifle before Nolen had succeeded in boring a hole in her.

"What the devil will we do?" asked Connors, as for the fourth time the gypsy dropped down to avoid still another shot.

It came quick enough, but as the boat was buried just at that moment in a slight trough between two waves, it whizzed harmlessly over their heads.

"A miss is as good as a mile," muttered Fergus Connors, as for the fifth time the gypsy rose and worked their boat ahead.

"A couple of more misses," said the gypsy, "and we may manage to get out of range."

"If we do, ye may bet your best dollar that it will be the breaking up of that gang of scoundrels."

Down dropped the gypsy again, and at the same instant a crash and ripping of splinters was heard as a ball struck the boat in the seam where the stern was joined to the sides.

This last shot was a disastrous one for the two intrepid officers, as it laid the stern open, and let the water in at a furious rate.

The chances for the two officers were exceedingly critical, but Connors appeared equal to the emergency.

Tearing his coat from his back, he forced it in the hole in the stern of the boat, and, for the time being, succeeded in stopping the leak.

"We are all right, now!" he remarked, when the gypsy replied:

"Not yet."

"By George! but we are out of range now, I reckon!" said Connors.

"But they have launched a boat, and are going to give us a chase!" exclaimed the gypsy.

"Aha! that's the racket, is it?" muttered Connors, gritting his teeth, and looking backward with an expression upon his fine features, from which all show of good humor had vanished.

"That's the racket!" replied the gypsy, as he bent to upon his oars, and pulled vigorously toward the opposite shore.

There were six of the burglars who had started in pursuit, and all of them were well armed and determined.

Nolen stood in the prow, rifle in hand, prepared at any moment, when within proper range, to blaze away at the two men, both of whom he was determined to kill.

CHAPTER XIV.

Nearer and nearer approached the robbers, and yet the gypsy did not relax his efforts, but manfully pulled away.

Nolen appeared satisfied with the range, and raised his rifle to fire; one moment and it would most certainly have been "all up" with either one of the two detectives, when a sudden lurch in his boat threw the intended assassin from his feet.

This little accident proved providential.

Here he recovered his feet, a schooner, which had hove in sight a few minutes before, sighted the two boats, and the men on board of the former, evidently suspecting that something was wrong, tacked about and bore down upon the foremost one.

In the meantime, the sheltered craft containing the Gypsy and Irish Detective was rapidly filling and settling.

"Faith! we'll have a swim of it in a moment," exclaimed Connors, as he rose in the boat and signaled for the men on the schooner to come to them.

An instant later the boat settled and sunk, and the two officers were left struggling in the water.

Both were excellent swimmers, and managed to keep afloat until the schooner was hove to, a boat lowered, and they were rescued.

As the two detectives crawled up on the deck of the schooner, after having been rescued, the gypsy chanced to glance toward the cabin, when he caught a passing glimpse of the face of a beautiful woman.

For the moment he thought little of this commonplace incident, but some time later a thought flashed across his mind which caused him to inquire of the captain, in an indifferent manner, who the young lady was.

In answer to this inquiry the captain said, quickly:

"You are misaken, my friend; there is no young lady on this schooner."

This denial was sufficient to arouse the gypsy's suspicions.

The schooner's destination was Yonkers, a place but a few miles up the river, and the two officers had been compelled to remain on board, as the captain said that he could not spare the time to land them, as he was going such a short distance.

As the officers could take the train and reach the city in an hour, they did not insist upon being put ashore, but decided to remain aboard and not put their rescuers to any inconvenience.

When the captain said that there was no lady on board, the detective merely remarked:

"Hang it! I must have been mistaken!" and walked away.

A moment later, he was leaning over the side of the schooner, and seemingly gazing into the water, but in reality, watching the movements of the captain.

Whatever suspicion he had formed, was almost instantly confirmed, as the captain, a moment after being left alone, went straight to the cabin.

"I thought so!" muttered the gypsy, and he stretched himself out upon the deck as carelessly as though he had no more concern in the world than to doze the time away like the purring cat.

After remaining about ten minutes in the cabin, the captain came forth, and approaching the gypsy, said:

"I can heave to, and land you now if you wish to go ashore."

"Just as you please," replied the gypsy.

There was not a very strong breeze at the time, and the captain had little trouble in bringing his vessel to.

A boat was immediately lowered, and the two detectives were landed upon the New York side of the river, at their own request.

The moment the boat had put back toward the schooner, the Irish Detective said:

"There's something up, gypsy."

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"What did you notice on board the schooner?"

"A handsome girl in the cabin."

"Well, what else?"

"She was there unwillingly—most likely a prisoner."

"How did you know that?"

"By her face! I read the whole story on her pretty face!"

"And you gave no sign?" said the gypsy, in a tone of surprise.

"No; because I saw at once that you had dropped to something."

"Who do you suspect that girl to be?"

"A step-sister to the devil, for all I know!" replied the Irish Detective, with one of his humorous smiles.

The gypsy now related the discovery he had made of the form of a dead female in the crevice of the rock leading to the robbers' den.

When he concluded his narrative the imperturbable Connors remarked, innocently:

"The girl on the schooner and the dead one can't be the same, that's sure."

"No," replied the gypsy, thoughtfully; "and yet something warns me that we have a right to know who that girl is on the schooner."

"You're right there; and that is why I wondered at your being so ready to be landed."

"I'll tell you why: I wanted to throw the captain off his guard; we will meet the schooner at Yonkers."

"What is the idea that you have got into your head?" asked Connors.

"I have but one idea, that is to find out who that mysterious girl is."

"And why don't you say that you want to go it alone?"

"I thought that I would leave you to guess that."

"All right, me boy. I will take the down train and you the up."

"Yes."

"And when shall we see your handsome face again?"

"Before daylight to-morrow, unless a big storm comes up."

"I understand. Well, here we are in sight of the station; but remember we are marked men; every one of that gang will be on the lay for us."

The train for the city arrived first, and the Irish Detective took passage on it after exchanging a few words more with the gypsy.

It was fully an hour later when the up train came along; and it was fully two hours subsequent to the landing from the schooner that the gypsy found himself in Yonkers.

Going down to the landing, he saw the schooner some distance down the river, slowly making her way through the water.

"Good!" muttered the detective, and he walked away.

Shortly after noon the schooner made the landing.

A well-dressed handsome young man, in a new suit of clothes, stood upon the wharf, as the vessel was made fast.

The young stranger had a basket, and a fishing-pole, and other tackle in his hand, and after the schooner had been made fast to the dock, he took a position on the string-piece from where he could observe all that transpired on the deck of the craft, while seemingly deeply engaged in watching for a bite.

The schooner's cargo was made up of iron, and as soon as she was made fast to the dock, the hands at once commenced to discharge her under the direction of the captain.

Thus the hours passed until sunset.

Finally, night fell, and the work on the vessel ceased.

In the meantime, the mysterious fisherman who had sat so patiently throughout the whole afternoon, gathered up his tackle, and moving up the wharf, acted in a careless indifferent manner until he reached a point opposite a pile of lumber, not a hundred feet distant from where the schooner was moored.

Then, after casting a furtive glance in every direction, he dodged behind the lumber, and,

casting down his rod and basket, took a position from whence he still commanded a view of all that occurred upon or near the vessel.

Thus an hour passed.

The signal light had been run up on the stays, and finally, one after another of the crew had come ashore and wandered off up in the town until all had left the vessel save the captain.

There was no other vessel within a thousand feet of the schooner, and as the last steamer had stopped and gone—even the dock-master had closed his little office and had gone off home—the dock and vicinity was entirely deserted.

After the departure of the dock-master, the mysterious individual in the new clothes came forth from his hiding-place behind the lumber, and stole stealthily toward the schooner.

He crawled around on his hands and knees toward the stern, and lying flat upon his stomach, peeped in the cabin window.

In the center of the cabin stood a beautiful girl, evidently not more than eighteen or nineteen years of age.

She stood with her hands upraised, as though motioning some person back, and upon her exquisitely lovely features rested a look of abhorrence, mingled with an expression of horror.

The detective's blood boiled with indignation, upon recognizing the fact that the person whom this terrified girl was waving back was the captain of the schooner.

The first impulse of the gypsy was to rush right into the cabin, and demand to know the cause of the scene which he then witnessed; but in an instant his usual caution bid him wait and watch.

Before interfering he determined, if possible, to hear what the trouble was about, and learn the relations existing between the two persons.

As described, at the moment the detective peeped through the cabin window, he saw the young girl standing in a defiant attitude, while directly opposite to her stood the captain.

For a moment silence followed after the gypsy first saw them; then the voice of the captain was heard to say:

"It is useless, Emily, for you to offer resistance; you may scream as loud as you have a mind to, but there is not a living soul within a mile of this vessel at this moment."

"You are mistaken there, my fine gentleman," muttered the detective, as he strained his ear to hear the girl's reply.

CHAPTER XV.

A SHADOW passed over the face of the girl, as she asked:

"Have you no mercy in your heart?"

"Didn't I have mercy when I sprung into the river, and saved you from a watery grave?"

"You forgot that I leaped into the river to save the honor of which you would now rob me."

"I have offered to marry you."

"Captain Merritt, you are a dishonorable man! This address to me is mean and cowardly!"

"Why mean and cowardly?"

"Because, you know well enough that, even if I were willing to marry you, that you are not legally at liberty to marry me."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because you have a wife already."

"If I prove that this is not so, will you become my wife?"

"No; I can not."

"See here, we have indulged in this talk long enough! It is time to talk common sense. You are friendless, and I would be your friend—your friend for life!"

"Then suffer me to leave this vessel."

"No; but you must and shall be mine!" and as the captain spoke, he made one step toward the girl with his arms extended, as though about to grasp her, when she presented a small pistol at his head, point-blank, and exclaimed:

"Back! I tell you. I will protect myself at the expense of your life!"

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed the captain, as he halted, "so you've got a shooter, eh?"

"Yes, I have, and I will use it!"

A moment's silence followed.

At length the captain said:

"Come, Emily, this little scene has been on the boards long enough; you might as well make up your mind at once to be friends with me, as I am determined that you shall."

"I give you one minute to leave this cabin,"

replied the girl, in a resolute tone of voice.

Her demand was met with a derisive laugh.

"I am in earnest, Captain Merritt."

"And so am I!" exclaimed the captain, as he suddenly leaped forward, and knocking the pistol from the girl's grasp with his powerful hand, he clasped her in his arms.

One scream issued from the poor girl's lips and all was silent.

The next instant the report of a pistol was heard, the cabin door was burst in, a bright light was sprung through the opening, and the sound of a desperate struggle followed.

The struggle lasted but a few seconds: two or three dull thuds were heard, and a heavy body rolled upon the cabin floor.

"That settles the scoundrel!" said a voice, and the next instant came the inquiry:

"Where are you, miss? You are safe."

No answer came.

Suddenly the detective thought that he heard the slight rustle of a dress.

He turned toward the open door, and saw, by the aid of the glimmering stars, a figure moving stealthily out of the cabin.

Stepping over the prostrate form of the captain, the gypsy glided after the retreating figure of the girl.

Swiftly the latter moved toward the side of the vessel, but toward the side opposite to the docks.

Instantly the detective saw her intention, and springing forward, seized her just as she was leaping over the quarter-rail.

Gently, yet firmly, he drew her back, with the assurance in a rich, manly voice:

"Fear not, you are safe! No need to commit this rash deed."

"There is safety for me only beneath the waves."

"No; you are safe with me."

"Who are you?"

"A stranger—but one who will protect you from every harm!" and as the gallant detective spoke he drew the girl gently away from the side of the vessel.

Reluctantly the girl allowed herself to be led away, and when partly across the vessel, she asked:

"Where is the captain?"

"The scoundrel lies where he ought to," was the reply; "upon his cabin floor, with a broken head."

"You have not killed him?" murmured the girl, in terror.

"No; such vermin as that man is can not be so easily stamped out."

"Oh! what shall I do? Where shall I go?"

"Well, I think the first thing for you to do is to get away from the vicinity of this vessel."

"But where shall I go?"

"Have you no home?"

"I have no home," was the mournful and startling reply.

"Have you no friends?"

"Not one on earth."

For a moment the detective was silent; then he asked:

"Can you trust me, Miss Emily?"

After a few seconds' silence, she said:

"I have no friend in the world, and being so poor in this respect, I do not feel that I can refuse an offer of kindness from any one; and yet those whom I have heretofore most trusted have proved my bitterest enemies."

"Miss Emily, I am an officer—a policeman; I am well known, and can satisfy you that I am worthy of confidence."

"How did you learn my name?" asked the girl, apprehensively.

"I overheard the captain address you as Emily, and as I know no other name to address you by, I have used that one."

"That is my name," after a moment said the girl, hesitatingly.

"And your last name?"

"Mermier."

"Well, all right, Miss Mermier, strange chances have thrown us together. I find you friendless, and without daring to tender my own friendship, I can promise you that of your own sex—persons who owe much to me, and who, like you, were once friendless and helpless—but who are now rich and powerful."

"A strange impulse agitates me to trust you."

"There is one thing certain," at length said the detective, with a peculiar emphasis; "you will have to remain under my protection for the present, at all hazards."

"Where will you take me?" asked the girl, in trembling accents.

"I will take you to the care of those whom I have mentioned."

After a moment's thought, the girl said: "I feel impelled to trust you; let me whither you choose."

CHAPTER XVI.

One distinguishing characteristic of the gypsy was promptness.

He never discovered the least shadow of indecision.

"Come."

"But the captain?" said the girl.

"What of him?"

"He may be dying."

The gypsy pointed toward the cabin door, not five paces distant across the deck.

The girl glanced in the direction indicated, and there beheld standing, just within the shadow of the cabin door, a human form.

"He is not badly hurt," said the detective, in a clear, threatening tone of voice; "but he will be unless he is careful."

It was near midnight, yet the officer went straight to a livery-stable, and succeeded in arousing one of the employees.

When the latter learned that it was a horse wagon, and driver that was wanted, he said that it was too late to hire out a carriage—and at that time of night.

The gypsy whispered a few words in the man's ear, when, without another word, the latter went about hitching up a team.

A quarter of an hour later, the gypsy and his companion were being driven along the dark road.

The gypsy had given the driver directions as to his course, and the man appeared to know the road well, and nothing more was said until the carriage halted at the entrance gate to the grounds of an elegant villa.

The detective assisted his companion to alight from the wagon, and he at once said to the driver:

"You can go!"

When at the foot of the steps leading up to the broad piazza, the girl once again hesitated and drew back, as though still reluctant to enter the house, when the gypsy said:

"Fear not; I tell you that, although not owner, I am a sort of master in this house."

Without further ado, he led the girl up the broad steps, and grasping the bell-knob, gave a furious pull.

Ten minutes passed, then a light flashed through the side-windows, and a step was heard advancing along the hall.

An instant later, a voice from within inquired:

"Who's there at this hour?"

"Philip Tremain," was the reply.

Instantly the bolt flew back, and the door was opened.

The party who opened the door was a frail-looking young man, who the moment he swung the door open, exclaimed:

"Hail and welcome! my brave friend!"

"You must find an excuse for me for arousing you at such an unseemly hour," replied the gypsy, as he clasped the other's hand and shook it cordially.

"You have not aroused me from my slumbers, as I was but in the library, studying over an intricate law point; and, besides, you are the last man to offer excuses for disturbing any one beneath this roof."

"Thank you," said the detective.

At this moment the master of the mansion noticed the form of the girl, and he exclaimed:

"Ah, ha! but you're not alone!"

"No; allow me to introduce Miss Emily Mermier, a lady for whom I shall claim the friendship of your amiable wife."

"Miss Mermier is welcome, and thrice welcome when you claim our kindness in her behalf! Come in, come in, and I will call Mrs. Urquhardt immediately."

"Under other circumstances," said the gypsy, "I would not permit you to disturb your wife, but to-night I will not say nay."

Emily Mermier was about to speak and protest, as the master of the house, after ushering his guests into the drawing-room, started to call his wife, but the detective restrained her, and said:

"If you please, remember that we *must* have a lady to look after you."

Those of our readers who read the former adventures of the Gypsy Detective, have already guessed who was the owner of the mansion into which the officer had brought the girl; and,

half an hour later, when an elegant lady came into the room, few would have recognized in the handsome matron the delicate Gerty Lander, who was once a prisoner in the New York Tombs, and a convicted thief in the eyes of the law.

As the latter entered the room she greeted the detective cordially, and then turned, with a friendly smile of welcome, toward the timid, shrinking girl who stood beside him.

"Mrs. Urquhardt," said the gypsy, "explanations, I know, are not necessary from me; it is enough when I introduce to you Miss Emily Mermier, a young lady who needs sympathy and protection, and a temporary asylum under your roof."

If the girl who had accompanied the gypsy had possessed a heart as hard as steel, she could not have resisted the sweet, angelic cordiality, and graciously kind welcome of the lovely woman who advanced toward her, and said:

"Emily, you are welcome. I was once in trouble and distress, and the noble man who brought you here proved himself a friend in need and in deed; and this is the first opportunity that we have had to requite his kindness, and I beseech you, as a favor, to allow me to call you my friend, and render you any service that you may require."

The waif that the detective had brought to the Urquhardt home proved instantly that, though friendless, she was a lady in breeding, and accepting the proffer of friendship in the most graceful manner.

"We will excuse you now," said the gypsy, in his old-fashioned abrupt manner, motioning the lovely hostess to lead her midnight guest away.

An hour later all was silent in the great mansion.

CHAPTER XVII.

LATE upon the morning succeeding the events related, the Gypsy Detective was sitting in the breakfast-room of the Urquhardt's home, when its beautiful mistress came to him and said, with a bright smile of confidence upon her lovely face:

"I have thawed the iceberg, Philip."

"And has she told you her story?" exclaimed the gypsy, excitedly.

"A portion of it only; but I doubt not but that you will be able to extract the whole story from her. She is ready to receive you in the library, and I hope that hers is to be a good fortune in the end, for never in my life have I met a person in whom I felt a greater interest."

Little dreaming how his own destiny was to be intertwined with the beautiful but friendless stranger, the gypsy proceeded to the library, fully decided as to who she was, and as fully determined to extract a confession from her.

Upon entering the room, the detective was fairly startled, as well as bewitched, as he recognized the wondrous beauty of the girl.

Mrs. Urquhardt had loaned the stranger some of her own apparel, and if Emily Mermier appeared handsome in the bedraggled clothes which she had worn when rescued from the river, she appeared proportionately more bewilderingly beautiful in her present attire.

Involuntarily the gypsy exclaimed, as he gazed upon her:

"How beautiful you are!"

The stranger blushed and replied, as a saddened expression flitted over her face:

"This is hardly a fitting occasion for the exchange of compliments."

"I beg pardon," promptly explained the gypsy; "my exclamation of tribute to your beauty was involuntary."

"You have certainly redeemed your promise, Mr. Fairy Prince," said the girl, still blushing, and evidently with the intention of changing the conversation.

"In what manner?" asked the gypsy.

"By bringing me among kind people; and I have also learned how greatly you are deserving of confidence and trust."

"I am glad to hear you make this last remark, as it is your confidence that I now seek."

More painfully than ever the girl now blushed, as she answered:

"I wish that I had some confidence to bestow, but, truly, I have not. There is no secret concerning me, as your kind friend, Mrs. Urquhardt, appears to suppose."

"Miss Mermier," said the detective, after a moment's silence, "a physician has the privilege of asking questions in order to get at the diagnosis of a patient's complaint; lawyers have

the same privilege in regard to clients; and detectives also have certain privileges of the same character. Now, then, my interest in your behalf must be my excuse for seeming bluntness; and I mean no disrespect, nor do I intend to hint at any unfavorable suspicions, when I say that your present situation is strongly suggestive of a strange history."

"My story is quickly told. I was left an orphan when an infant, and placed in the Alms House, from whence I was taken by a kind family and kindly reared."

A pleased smile broke over the gypsy's face at this confirmation of his suspicions, as he exclaimed:

"I could have told you so much of your history!"

The girl looked the officer straight in the eye, and a rather severe expression rested upon her beautiful features, as she ejaculated:

"Indeed!"

"Yes; I could have told you that the man who adopted you was a millionaire, and that he brought you up and educated you just as though you were his own child."

"You have been, or you are dreaming!" said the girl, quietly but firmly.

The detective was astounded upon hearing this last remark, and he asked, eagerly:

"Is it possible that I am mistaken?"

"You are certainly mistaken."

"I will speak plainly. Were you not adopted and educated by the millionaire, Mr. Gasquoine?"

"I was adopted and educated by two maiden ladies who earned their living by teaching, but who still found sufficient time to bestow a great deal of care upon me."

The gypsy was completely nonplussed; he saw no reason to doubt the girl's assertion; every tone of her voice indicated that she was speaking the truth, and if she was speaking the truth, his fine-spun theory in regard to her was completely shattered, and his disappointment was proportionately great.

For a moment neither spoke, but at length the detective said:

"Are those maiden ladies living who adopted you?"

"No, sir."

"How long have they been dead?"

"Two years."

"Where have you been during the interim since their death until now?"

"Working as a teacher."

"In the city of New York?"

"No, sir; in a country town."

"That settles it!" muttered the gypsy, now thoroughly convinced that he was on the wrong track, and that the whereabouts of the missing daughter of the millionaire was as great a mystery as ever.

The gypsy had some further conversation with the girl whom he had rescued, and then left her to go and tell the result of the colloquy to his friend.

As he left the room, he muttered:

"I fear the girl we seek lies in the cavern of the robber's den."

Before the Gypsy Detective left the house of his friend an arrangement had been made whereby Emily Mermier was to remain in a capacity that enabled her to earn her living and avoid eating the bread of dependence.

A week subsequent to the events above stated, the community of the great metropolis of the city of New York were startled by one of those awful tragedies that so frequently happen to horrify them.

This time, instead of a fearful murder, the cause of the excitement was a mysterious suicide.

The self-murderer was an eccentric old man, who had long been an invalid, and who, it was stated, had lived a solitary life for years.

The circumstances of the suicide, as detailed by the housekeeper, who made the discovery, were as follows:

Upon the evening preceding his death, Mr. Gasquoine had been unusually despondent; in fact, he had hinted to Mrs. Vance, his housekeeper, that he did not believe that he would be *alive in the morning*.

An inquest was held, and under oath the housekeeper repeated the above statement, and testified as to the finding of the body.

She said that usually she did not enter the old man's room mornings until summoned; but upon the morning when she found his body, a strange impulse, for which she could not account, induced her to go to his door and knock.

After rapping once or twice and receiving no

response, she had entered the room, and discovered Mr. Gasquoine sitting in his chair, robed in his dressing-gown, the same that he had worn when she parted from him the night previous.

His position was natural, and she at first thought that he was asleep, and was on the point of leaving the room without disturbing him, when she noticed that *his eyes were open*.

The first glance, upon a nearer approach, convinced her that the old man was dead, although, to make assurance doubly sure, she spoke to him twice in a loud tone.

She did not expect a reply, and received none.

Advancing and placing her hand upon his forehead, she found that it was stone cold.

She took hold of his hand and felt of his wrist, and it was pulseless.

"Then," said the woman, "I gave one scream and fell insensible to the floor, where I was found by the girl-of-all-work from the kitchen."

The kitchen-girl corroborated the testimony of the housekeeper, as to finding the latter insensible upon the floor, after coming into the room, attracted by a scream.

The Irishwoman further testified that she found, upon the stand near the suicide's chair, an empty paper which she produced, and a partially empty glass.

Previous examinations of the paper had already proved the fact that it had contained strichine, and an analysis discovered remains of the same deadly poison in the liquid left in the bottom of the glass.

Further testimony was given as to minor corroborative matters. A verdict of suicide was rendered, and a permit given for the burial of the body.

There were quite a number present at the inquest, besides the coroner, the attendant policemen and the jurymen.

Among the strangers present, were four individuals well known to our readers; they were the four skillful detectives who had set out to unravel the Gasquoine mystery, which had thus unexpectedly become a deeper one, owing to the singular and suspicious death of the old man himself.

During the investigation these experienced men had been engaged quietly making observations, and at the conclusion of the inquest they held a short consultation among themselves, when their united verdict was, that it was not a case of suicide, but that a deliberate murder had been perpetrated.

Among those present at the inquest, was young Gasquoine, the dead man's nephew and heir-at-law, and the only person ostensibly benefited by his decease.

As Sleuth appeared in *propria persona*, young Gasquoine did not recognize him, as he had only met the great detective when the latter was disguised.

The other officers were unknown to him also; consequently the young man was unsuspecting of the fact that he was moving and acting under the secret surveillance of four shrewd, careful and experienced detectives.

The inquest was held in the back parlor of the house, and at the time the housekeeper, Mrs. Vance, was testifying, Gasquoine stood directly opposite to her, and in such a position that he could fasten his eyes directly upon her, and, if necessary, telegraph a visual signal.

Old Sleuth stood leaning against the folding-door frame, and in such a position that he could watch the countenances of both.

The moment the woman stepped forward to give her sworn testimony, the detective recorded a fact that was unobserved by any one else present.

The witness and the dead man's heir exchanged a meaning glance.

"This is a case of murder!" was the instant conclusion of Sleuth; and at once every faculty was strained to confirm this conviction.

During the examination of the housekeeper the officer noted another remarkably significant fact.

The woman was very slow and deliberate in giving her answers, and never made a positive reply without first exchanging a telegraphic signal with the man with whom she had first exchanged a meaning glance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

QUIETLY old Sleuth watched and listened, and as each bit of testimony was given it was weighed and balanced by his strong mind until

a perfect theory was clearly wrought out as to when, and how, and for what purpose, and by whom a diabolical murder had been perpetrated.

Old Sleuth's conclusions were founded, in brief, upon the following facts:

Firstly—Upon the evident collusion between the heir-at-law, Gasquoine, and the woman Mrs. Vance.

Secondly—The housekeeper's story went too directly toward establishing a positive impression; there was *too plausible a purpose in it*.

Thirdly—Sleuth knew, from conversations with the deceased, that he feared to die, and that the dread of death was the heaviest burden on his soul.

Again, it was a singular fact that upon this especial morning the woman should go to his room, contrary to her usual custom; and, with several other little singularities, it was most singular that upon the handle of the spoon with which the fatal draught had been stirred should be wound about one thread of hair, which was a perfect match of the peculiar locks that graced the head of Mrs. Vance.

Verily, the story of the old millionaire's murderer *hung by a hair*; but old Sleuth was determined to mold that hair into many strands, until he was able to weave a rope whereby to hang the guilty man or woman who had foully terminated an old man's life.

As previously recorded, to the coroner and jury everything appeared straight and probable, and their verdict was rendered in accordance with the known facts.

After the inquest, the four detectives held a consultation, as recorded, and at once four individuals were placed under surveillance.

Upon the morning following the inquest, an old Irishman might have been seen passing occasionally the house where the dead millionaire lay.

He appeared to be merely some lazy nomad of the streets, who hardly knew what to do with himself or how to spend his time.

At one time, as he passed along the streets, he appeared to be looking for a certain number, and then, seemingly baffled, he would stand and scratch his head in the most perplexed manner possible.

An hour passed, when from the house where the dead man lay there came forth three persons. A gentleman and two ladies heavily veiled and dressed in deep mourning.

As these parties came from the house, the old Irishman was standing gazing in a bothered manner, studying the number upon the adjoining house.

As the gentleman and ladies passed him, the former actually brushed against him.

The old man did not appear to notice them until they had passed, when raising his eyes to an opposite house, he met the glance of a woman seated at the parlor window.

A meaning glance was exchanged between the lady at the window and the old Irishman, and a moment later the former disappeared from the window and came forth from the house, and without again even glancing at the old man, passed up the street, going in the same direction as the party who had come from the house where the dead millionaire lay in his coffin.

As the last lady passed up the street and disappeared, the old Irishman muttered:

"Begorra! but now the road is clear!"

As the old man uttered the above sentence, the Irish servant came forth from the basement door of the house, and coming to the gate, stood and gazed after the party who had passed out from the front door.

While standing there she was addressed by the Irishman.

"Good luck to me at last, Mrs. McGinnis, it that's yer name! but I'd know yer face among a thousand, though devil a memory had I uv the house where ye resided, ma'am."

"And who are ye, and how do you know that Mrs. McGinnis is me name?"

"Faith! it's alsy tellin' who I am, sence I've hed the luck to find yersel'."

"Go along wid ye, ye old beggar! Faith! there's nothing ye can get out o' me this day wid yer blarney, seein' that wo hev the dead within the house."

"Faith! is that so? Well, but it's nothing but what's me own that I'm aither wantin' from yer."

"Yer own yer aither? Faith! what hev I belonging to ye?"

"Truth! ye hev something that I made to aise me bread!"

"An' what is it?"

"Begorra! it's me buck and saw that I left wid ye a spell back."

"Upon we sowl!" exclaimed the Irishwoman, "an' ye're the old man what sawed the wood for us a spell back, and wint off widout gettin' yer pay, an' leavin' yer buck an' saw behind ye?"

"I'm that same unfortunate man."

"An' what brought ye away widout finishin' yer job, or gettin' yer money, an' yer buck an' saw?"

"Be the powers! but I wint to get a sup ov something to drinik around the corner, and I couldn't find me way back."

"An' how did ye work widout yer tools?"

"Divil a stroke ov work hav I done since."

"Troth, but ye are a ne'er-do-well. But come, an' I'll give ye yer buck an' saw; but the master that was to pay ye for yer work now lies in his coffin in the parlor above."

"Ye don't tell me so!"

"But I do; an' if ye get yer money from the new one, it's I that will have to swear to yer bill as correct."

"Indade, is that so?"

"But there's been strange happenings in this house sence ye sawed the load ov wood."

"It's them that are happening every day, Mrs. McGinnis."

"An' how did ye know that was me name?"

"Shure ye tould me the day I sawed the wood."

"Well, come in. Faith, but it's almost afear'd I am to stay in the house alone wid the nagur they have to sit wid the body."

"And is there no one else in the house wid ye?"

"Divil a one—an' they just wint off together—but the black teller—an' he's as black as death itself, shure. But come in, old man, come in—an' what's yer name?"

"Shure there's many an Irishman named Barney, an' I'm one of them, so I am, faith!"

"Well, Barney, yer tools are down in the cellar, an' ye can get them afther a bit; but tell me, hav ye heard of the happenings in this house the week?"

"Divil a thing have I heard."

"Oh, but it's fearful happenings we've had!"

"Was the house afire?" asked the old man.

"Worse nor that! Shure the old gintieman, the master, wint an' killed himself—at least, so they say that he did."

"Faith, if he's dead, they must say truly," remarked the old man, innocently.

"He's dead, throe enough; but it's strangle to me that he should take his own life."

"Was there any one had an interest in taking it for him?" asked the old Irishman, and while he spoke there was a peculiar glitter in his eyes.

For an instant Mrs. McGinnis made no reply, but sat with her hands clinched, swaying to and fro in her chair, in a manner peculiar to old women when troubled by sorrow or perplexity.

"These things are bad, Mrs. McGinnis," again remarked the old man.

"Shure, Barney, did ye ever see a ghost?" asked the woman, suddenly.

"Did I ever see a ghost, Mrs. McGinnis? Troth, an' I did mony a one."

"An' were they rale livin' ghosts?"

"No; but they were rale dead ones, to be shure."

"Faith, thin it was a rale live one that I saw last night."

"Indade!"

"As shure as I'm sittin' here this moment!"

"An' was it the old man movin' around out from his coffin?"

"No, it was not."

"Whose ghost was it ye saw?"

"Whist now!" answered the old woman, in a husky voice, and leaning her head forward toward her companion. "Whist now!" she repeated, "but I must get this thing off of me moind anyhow!"

"If ye have a sacret, Mrs. McGinnis, ye hadn't be afear'd of an ould man like me."

"Shure I must use me mind to some one, and I wouldn't dare tell the new master or his sister."

"An' the housekeeper, ye couldn't tell her?"

"An' what do ye know about the house keeper?" exclaimed Mrs. McGinnis, sharply.

"Little enough, but I don't like her looks."

"An' whin did ye ever see her?"

"The day that I was sawin' the wood. Faith, wasn't she all the time at the front winder?"

"It's right ye must be, as she is seldom anywheres else whin she's idle. An' ye don't like her looks?"

"Not a bit."

"Troth, nor I—nor her ways aither!" said the woman, with a frown.

"But tell me about the ghost. Faith, I always tuk an intherist in thim hobgoblins since the time I was frightened by one whin a boy."

"Well, ye know, there used to be a young lady livin' in this house—an adopted daughter of the man that lies in his coffin above there."

"Ye tould me about this young lady onct."

"Well, ye know that one day she was suddenly missin', an' she's never been seen since."

"An' didn't they try to find her?"

"They did."

"But have never heard anything about her since?"

"Divil a word."

"Ye was tellin' me about the ghost, Mrs. McGinnis; will ye plaza finish yer story? Faith, as I said, I'm fond of hearin' about ghosts. An' whose was it ye saw?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"WELL, last night I was kept below stairs until after midnight, and there was no other body stirring in the house beside mesel."

"Was there no watchman there with the corpse?"

"No; the nagur didn't come until this mornin', shure."

"Well, go on. Ye were sayin' that ye were goin' up the stairs after midnight."

"Yes; well, just as I come forinst the door of the room where the body lay, I just thought that I would look in, especially as I noticed that the door was on a crack. Well, I pushed the door open and looked in, and there, leaning upon the coffin, was the form of a female!"

"The missin' girl, was it?" asked the old man, with startlin energy.

"Whist now, until I tell yer. Well, I saw the form of a female, and I thought at first that it was the French girl who was the old man's niece, an' I was just movin' away, so as not to disturb her in her sorri, whin the stranger raised her head, an' I thought that me heart would stop beatin'; it turned so cold in me bosom, upon indin', that I was gazin upon the face of the dead."

"The face of the dead, Mrs. McGinnis!"

"Troth, to this moment I believe that it was not a livin' face I saw."

"An' whose face was it?"

"The face of the girl who wint away an' never came back."

"Why didn't ye speak to her, Mrs. McGinnis, an' find out whetheher she were dead or livin'?" Ye may have been deceived."

"Troth, whin I first caught the glance of them starin', glazed eyes, I closed me own for a second, an' whin I opened them again the thing had vanished."

"Oh, but that's a frightful story ye are tellin' me."

"Faith, but it was more frightful for me to meet the thing alone by mesel' at that hour of the night."

"An' ye never heard any one go in or out of the house before or afther ye saw the ghost?"

"Not a sowl!"

"It was a ghost, shure, Mrs. McGinnis, an' if ye see it again I would advise ye that ye pay no attention to it at all; ye might be sorry afther. But tell me, wasn't that some of the relatives that left the house a spell ago?"

"Faith, they were all the relatives the ould man had in the world, and one over."

"An' who was the one over?"

"The housekeeper, shure."

"An' are they goin' to lave you alone in the house all day?"

"Faith, they towld me not to expect them back afther night, bad luck to them! Faith, I towld them that I'd not be remaining in the house, an' I hev a mind to lave this moment!"

"I wouldn't do that. But me buck an' saw—ye say that it's in the cellar?"

"Yes. Ye can go down an' get it yersel'."

"Faith, an' it may be safe there. I'll lave it until to-morrow. I wouldn't hev much chance for getting a job to-day; but could I go upstairs and look at the body? Faith, I hev a fondness for lookin' at the dead."

"Yer welcome, for all me. Ye can ask the nagur above. Shure he's the master of ceremonies for the present."

"Look here, Mrs. McGinnis. I'm very much interested about the ghost ye saw."

"Ye same to be."

"I am; an', begorra, if there was any way to get that nagur below stairs here for a moment,

lavin' me wid the dead man, I'm thinkin' I could give ye some information about that ghost."

"Troth, it's alsy gettin' the nagur below. Troth he's not had his dinner yet, an' it was I that was to serve it to him."

"Have ye it ready for him now?"

"I hev. It's but a cowld lunch he'll get, as there'll be no cookin' to-day, shure."

"Have him down; but don't ye let the black teller know that I'm around, an', begorta, it will not be long before we know all about the ghost."

Mrs. McGinnis set to work and prepared a cold lunch, and then summoned the colored watcher down-stairs.

The moment the latter came down, the old Irishman, who had been watching, stealthily passed up.

The old man who proclaimed his ability to detect the footsteps of the dead certainly acted very intelligently when once in the room where the corpse lay.

He did not go near the coffin—rather to the windows, both front and rear, and rapidly went through a little operation that can best be understood by a muttered utterance, after he had accomplished a certain purpose.

"Begorra," he murmured, "it's not likely they'll drop to that. An' once in the house to-night I'll lay to see the ghost mesel'. Faith, I'm fond of seein' ghosts, shure."

Half an hour later, after some further chat with Mrs. McGinnis, the old Irishman left the house, promising to call the next day for his buck and saw and pay for his labor.

CHAPTER XX.

IT was night, and beneath a low-burning gas-light in the back parlor of the Gasquino mansion rested its late owner in his coffin, sleeping the sleep of death.

There was but one living person within that gloomy room.

Upon the sofa sat a gray-haired negro.

The colored man's face and attitude were simply in character with his weird surroundings.

Presently the door of the room, which had been closed, was opened, and a man entered.

The intruder was a small-featured, snilo complexioned man, whose movements were liberate and cat-like.

The negro was dozing, and did not hear the newcomer enter, when the latter advanced on tiptoe, and, laying his hand upon the sleeper's shoulders, he said:

"Peter! Peter! wake up!"

"Yes!" exclaimed the colored man, starting up and rubbing his eyes.

"I thought that I hired you to watch!" said the man, sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Then how is it I find you sleeping?"

"Just dropped off this minute, sir."

"Answer me—has any one entered this room since I left you alone about an hour ago?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure."

"Yes, sir."

"You haven't seen any one enter this room?"

"No, sir."

"Nor heard a footprint?"

"No, sir."

"Nor the rustling of a dress?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir, I am sure."

"It must have been a fancy of Mrs. Vance," said the young man.

"What did Mrs. Vance imagine that she saw, sir?"

"She came into my room a few moments ago, and aroused me, and told me that she had opened her door at moment to get something in the hall, when she was startled by hearing a slight rustling noise, and that the next moment she saw a figure in white pass down the stairs."

"Did she say, sir, that the figure entered this room?"

"So Mrs. Vance asserts; and further, she says that the door was closed, and that she distinctly heard the turning of the knob."

"Mrs. Vance has been dreaming, sir."

"She must have been, as there is no person in the house besides yourself, my sister, the housekeeper, and the kitchen-servant."

"And she says that the figure she saw was clothed in white?"

"In pure white, she says."

"Figures almost always come dressed in white to persons that are dreaming, sir."

"If you are positive that no one entered this room, we can come to no other conclusion than that Mrs. Vance has been deceived by a dream, or some other hallucination."

"Unless she saw a ghost, sir."

"A ghost!" exclaimed young Gasquoine. "No, no; I don't believe in ghosts; and don't you mention that nonsense to any of the women folks."

"No, sir; I know better than that, but only suggested it to you."

"Well, don't mention such a thing to any one else, and further, I want you to keep wide awake for the balance of the night—not that I believe that the housekeeper saw any figure, but it is best to be on the safe side."

"All right, sir; I shall not close my eyes again to-night—you can depend on me for that."

"I shall do so," said Gasquoine, and he left the room with the same deliberate, cat-like step with which he had entered it.

When once again alone, the darkey began to think over what he had heard.

His story about looking at the clock at five minutes before twelve was a falsehood; it was just one hour earlier that he had looked at the time-piece, and consequently he knew that he had really been asleep a full hour.

With this knowledge came an idea that probably while he had been sleeping the room really had been invaded by some living person, or by what he more dreaded—a wandering ghost.

The darkey believed in ghosts, if his less fearsome employer did not, and the thought that he had been sleeping calmly while supernatural being was gliding about the room filled him with horror.

Rising from the sofa, he walked restlessly two or three times around the room, and then advancing to the coffin, stood and gazed a moment at the rigid face of the corpse.

Suddenly, with a suppressed cry, the negro started back, and an instant later exclaimed.

"Gracious! what is that?"

Approaching again near to the coffin, he leaned over, and took a closer survey of the face of the dead.

There, plainly observable upon the cheek, directly beneath the gray eyelash, lay a crystal drop.

"It's a tear, as sure as I am born!" muttered the darkey, in terrified tones, and he leaned still nearer to the dead face as he spoke.

The man's first impression was that it was a case of "the dead alive." He pressed his hand upon the forehead of the corpse, and found that it was stone cold.

He tried other means to ascertain whether the man had really revived, but in every case he received a proof of absolute death.

In fact, a more critical examination discovered indications that could not be doubted.

Then came the thought that probably the housekeeper had spoken truly, and had not been deceived.

"If that tear had not fallen from the eye beneath which it lies, it must have dropped from the weeping eyelid of some one bending over that stark face."

This thought was just taking shape in the negro's mind, when suddenly every drop of blood in his body turned cold as a heavy hand was laid upon his throat.

"Do just as I tell you, and do not make any further remarks."

"You will not harm me, will you? I have no call in this house, only to watch the dead."

"Hold out your hands!"

The negro obeyed, when the man, who was masked, and had his head covered by a slouched hat, clapped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists in a dexterous manner, showing that he was used to the handling of these articles.

"Open your mouth!" said the slouched-hat man, after the steel wrists had been adjusted.

Finding that any sort of resistance would be dangerous, the negro made no ado about it, but opened his mouth as directed, when the man, with the same facility that he had handcuffed him, gagged him also.

"Now, then," remarked the strange operator. "I guess that I can rely upon your silence."

The man's next movements were about as significant as his previous ones.

Drawing a masked lantern from his pocket, he struck a match, and, after carefully examining the wick of his lamp, lit it.

He then deliberately removed a pair of shoes from his feet, and taking a lantern in one hand and a cocked revolver in the other, he left the room on tiptoe.

In the meantime the poor negro, securely bound and gagged, was a silent witness of these movements, and, as his thoughts were not fettered, he came to the conclusion that another murder was about to be committed.

The agony of the poor fellow's mind can well be imagined.

Helpless he lay, able to both see and hear, and each moment he anticipated hearing a death-shriek break the terrible stillness that pervaded the room where one corpse already lay.

While thus watching and listening, he saw the door open, and expected to see the midnight assassin return with a bloody weapon in his hand.

But instead, a figure glided into the room whose presence filled him with even more terror than did the strange movements of the man.

And yet there was nothing in the appearance of the last comer which would, under ordinary circumstances, have tended to frighten even a child.

It was the form of a female, evidently a young girl.

She was clad in pure white, and her beautiful hair fell unkempt down upon her shoulders.

There was nothing startling in either her stature or dress, but the expression upon her rigid features would have frozen a bolder person than the negro with horror, even under less startling surroundings.

The features were as regular and handsome as one imagines an angel's to be, but oh! they were so supernaturally white.

And there was something so weird-like and strange in her movements that the bound and gagged man who beheld her did not for a moment doubt but that he was gazing upon a restless visitant from the grave.

Every sense of the negro was held spell-bound by this strange vision, as the figure in white crossed the room to where the coffin was, and, leaning over, kissed the blue lips of the dead.

Suddenly the awful stillness was broken by a piercing shriek, that must have penetrated to every room in the house.

The next moment a second figure also clothed in white, rushed through the open door, and made a dash across the room as though about to grasp the first.

Upon the first sound of the cry, the figure by the coffin gave a great start, and then, instead of retreating, advanced to meet the woman moving toward her.

Here followed like what appeared to be a momentary struggle, and the flesh-and-blood female sank unconscious to the floor, without a murmur, while the other glided from the room as though she had suddenly vanished into thin air.

An instant later, with a face pale, and excited manner, Victor Gasquoine rushed into the room also.

The first object that met the latter's eyes was the unconscious form of the housekeeper lying upon the floor, and the second was the bound and gagged form of the negro doubled up upon the sofa.

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed the man, "what has happened?"

The housekeeper was mute from insensibility—and the negro could not reply because of the gag which prevented utterance.

Gasquoine saw what prevented the latter from answering, when taking a dagger which he held in his hand, he quickly freed the darkey, and asked.

"Tell me quick! quick! what has happened?"

CHAPTER XXII.

BRIEFLY and rapidly the negro related what had occurred, when Gasquoine exclaimed:

"Then there is an assassin in this house?"

"I don't know, sir, whether the man was an assassin or only a robber, but he was here, and served me just as I have told you."

At this moment the housekeeper revived, and rising to her feet, she glared around wildly for a moment, and then asked, excitedly:

"Where is she?"

"Who?" asked Gasquoine.

"There is but one person besides yourself and sister who has an interest in hovering around that cold thing there!" replied Mrs. Vance, pointing dramatically toward the coffin.

The negro had not mentioned in his relation that the apparition he had seen was that of a female; he had only said a ghost, without indicating the sex of the airy visitant.

The moment Victor Gasquoine heard the housekeeper's reply, his face became perfectly livid.

All thought of the masked burglar appeared to have been banished from his mind, as turning toward the negro he asked, in a fearfully excited manner:

"Was it the form of a female that you saw?"

Before the negro could reply, Mrs. Vance exclaimed:

"Have I not told you?"

"But it may have been a fancy of your excited imagination."

"Never! As sure as I am standing here, I saw and recognized the face of that girl."

The three persons were standing in the back parlor, near the coffin, while this startling and excited colloquy was in progress, and so absorbed were they in the thrilling topic that none of them observed a shadow thrown dimly upon the wall, as the head and shoulders of a man were thrust beyond the folding doors, and as suddenly withdrawn, after a keen pair of eyes had taken a momentary glance at them.

A moment's silence succeeded the housekeeper's last declaration, broken after a moment by the query from Gasquoine:

"Why did you not seize her if you were sure of her identity?"

"I tried to, but you can not grasp the dead with living hands. By a wave of her airy arm she struck me senseless!"

"Ishaw!" impatiently ejaculated Gasquoine, "this apparition fancy is nonsensical. If you saw her, she was as much a form of flesh and blood as yourself."

"You can never convince me that I gazed on aught else than the face of the dead!"

"Hadn't I better go to the police station for help, sir?" asked the negro.

"What for—to catch a ghost?" asked Gasquoine, with a sneer.

"You forgot the masked figure, sir."

"Bah! you have been outwitted by a girl. The masked man you saw was but a slender girl in disguise."

"No, sir—I know better than that!"

"Well, as you think that you do, and as you have been outwitted, I guess that I can dispense with your further services. I do not care to employ a man who has been fooled by an escaped lunatic."

"I know a male from a female, sir, and they may both have been ghosts, or both flesh and blood; but either way, they were not the same figures."

"Very well; we will say that you are right; but now listen—the whole affair is a mystery that I do not wish to become public. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"If it does become public, I shall hold you responsible, as what has happened within this room to-night will not be told by any one else."

"It is none of my business, and I shall not make it so."

"Very well. Come here in about a week, and if I find that you have been discreet and silent, you shall be handsomely paid for the fright you have suffered to-night."

"Then I am dismissed, sir?"

"Yes. I will watch the rest of the night myself, and if any more ghosts or white figures

OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

CLEVELAND, U.S.A., AUGUST 21, 1908.

A publication devoted to high-class Detective Literature. Published on alternate Fridays, by The Arthur Westbrook Company, 1422 Third Street, N. W., Cleveland, U. S. A.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE.

Per Year	\$1.50
Six Months75
Three Months40

Postage paid to all parts of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Cuba, the Canal Zone, Hawaii and the Phillipines. Stamps accepted the same as money. *Address letters to*

The Arthur Westbrook Company, Cleveland, U.S.A.

Tit-Bits of General Information

FROM ALL THE WORLD.

ON an average 700 British subjects are yearly born at sea.

ONE-THIRD of the recruits for the British Army enlist in London and Dublin.

SPAIN's population has increased by only 3,000,000 in the past forty-five years.

IN Australia engagement-rings are lent out by certain jewelers as part of their ordinary trade.

A FRENCHMAN can secure a divorce from his wife if she goes on the stage without his consent.

IN FRANCE the doctor's claim on the estate of a deceased patient has precedence of all others.

THE number of leaves on a large, 60 ft. high oak tree has been counted, and found to exceed 6,000,000.

AN eating-house, made entirely of compressed paper, has been erected in Hamburg. The dining-room is large enough to accommodate 150 persons.

Eskimo dogs have been driven forty-five miles over the ice in five hours. A picked team of these dogs once travelled six miles in twenty-eight minutes.

TELEGRAPH wires will last for forty years near the seashore, but in the manufacturing districts the same wires will last only ten years, and sometimes less.

THE Indian railways are the cheapest in the world. The average charge for passengers is one-fifth of a penny per mile, and for goods a halfpenny a ton per mile.

THE result of tests carried out in the German army proves that 68 lb. is the outside weight the average soldier can carry on a day's march without injuring his heart.

What is supposed to be a huge tooth from the lower jaw of some prehistoric monster has been found in the bed of the River Tees, just above Stockburn. It weighs 2 lb. 9 oz.

Self-Contained Family.—As he was the only man with young children in a district of Lane County, Oregon, Mr. John Larkin formed a school committee, of which he was elected chairman and his wife clerk. Mrs. Larkin was installed as teacher by the new chairman, and the five little Larkins go to school to their own mother, who is remunerated by the State.

Canal to Cross the Alps.—Signor Caminada, an hydraulic engineer, has drawn up a scheme for the construction of a canal to cross the Alps and connect Genoa with Lake Constance. The canal would be 336 miles long, existing watercourses being utilized for 161 miles. It would allow the passage of vessels of 600 tons and the carriage of 15,000,000 tons of cargo per annum.

Turtle Not Fish.—The Australian Commonwealth Customs Department has had to cudgel its brains in order to decide whether turtle is fish. An Act of the Commonwealth Parliament provides that a bounty is payable on preserved fish. An enterprising speculator in Northern Australia has been producing preserved turtle on an extensive scale, and he claimed the bounty under the Act. But, after much consultation of dietarians, the Department has decided that the turtle is not a fish, but a "reptile."

Queer Claims.—The chairman of an insurance company instanced claims which might arise that were little expected. Among them he mentioned claims from a domestic servant who swallowed her false teeth while eating, a manageress who poisoned her hands from constantly handling copper coins, a housekeeper who, sitting down on a darning needle, was surprised to see it work out at her ankle, an under-keeper shot by poachers, and accidents arising from walking in sleep, falling out of the window, and the separation of a cat from the tender mercies of a dog.

IT is a popular fallacy that fountain pens are quite a modern invention. As a matter of fact, an old work of reference published in 1795 contains an illustration of a fountain pen, the appearance of which is very much like those sold at the present time. Its construction, however, was somewhat elaborate and clumsy, the pen consisting of various pieces of metal, which had to be screwed and unscrewed before the pen could be used.

MR. NATHANIEL MOORE. of the Rock Island Railway, U. S. A., celebrated his inheritance of \$750,000 by giving a dinner which cost \$20,000. The men guests were presented with favors of gold and diamond sleeve-buttons, and the women with pearl necklaces.

CARRIER'S RECORD.—Mr. Thomas Stedman, who for over forty years was carrier between Brighton and Horsham, has just died at his home at Horsham, aged sixty-nine. He made 8,000 journeys between the two towns, traveling thus upwards of 180,000 miles.

PUBLISHERS were busy last year. There were 9,914 new books published in 1907, or 1,311 more than for 1906. Religion and Philosophy increased by 213, Law by 145, History and Biography by 232, Poetry by 69, and Medicine by 63.

WEDDINGS UNDER WATER.

THE marriage under water which it is proposed to celebrate at the London Hippodrome is a novel and attractive "turn" which is quite in keeping with the usual enterprise of that most successful of music-hall managers, Mr. Oswald Stoll. At the same time the idea is not altogether original, although it has never before been carried out in that country.

Last year the New York Hippodrome management, like Mr. Stoll, offered a large money prize to any pair who would be married at a matinee under a diving-bell in 14 ft. of water. Several couples offered to enter for the matrimonial stakes under these novel conditions, the pair ultimately selected being Mr. George Fairman, of Brooklyn, and Miss Alberta Mitchell, of Scranton, Pa.

The ceremony took place on September 12th last, both the bride and bridegroom, as well as the officiating minister and other occupants of the diving-bell, wearing bathing costumes, the bridal "dress" being of blue, with red and white trimmings. The ceremony was performed at noon by the Rev. W. D. Hughes, of the Coney Island Mission, in the presence of as many members of the Hippodrome company as could get inside the diving-bell. After the ceremony the clergyman and the witnesses dived under the bell and swam to the surface, while the bridal couple ascended in the bell without getting their clothes wet.

Not quite under water, but almost, and without the protection of a diving-bell, were a Virginian youth and maiden who, a short time ago, eloped and were joined together in the middle of the Potomac River, with the wind lashing the waves into foam, and the girl's parents trying with all their might to overtake the runaways in a small skiff.

Perhaps the most daring of freak weddings ever celebrated in America, however, was the ceremony which took place recently in Chicago on the top of a 200-ft. smoke-stack, in a gale of wind. The prize was offered by a gas and electric company, and consisted of a gas cooking stove and equipment, as well as \$25 in cash and the minister's fee.

No fewer than seven couples expressed their willingness to be married in the clouds in order to win this prize, and after a pair had been selected the ceremony took place 200 ft. above ground, while thousands of breathless spectators watched the event from a safer footing below. Needless to say, So-and-So's gas stoves were being talked of all over the town next day.

Holland has 10,100 windmills, each of which drains 310 acres of land, at an average of 20 cents an acre a year.

In different parts of the world 3,000 marriages take place every day, according to statistics collected by an American clergyman.

The atmosphere of Natal is so clear that it is sometimes possible to distinguish objects at a distance of twenty-five and even thirty miles.

THE Maiden Insurance Company is a singular Denmark institution. It is confined to the nobility, and the nobleman, as soon as a female child is born to him, enrolls her name on the company's books and pays in a certain sum, and thereafter a fixed annual amount, to the treasury. When the young girl has reached the age of twenty-one she is entitled to a fixed income and to an elegant suite of apartments, and this income and this residence, both almost princely, are hers until she either marries or dies. The society has existed for generations. It has always prospered. Thanks to it, poverty-stricken old maids are unknown amongst the Denmark nobility, but every maiden lady is rich and happy.

THE celebration of a Russian marriage sometimes extends over three days. At the wedding festivities the bride is expected to dance with the men one after another until she drops with sheer fatigue. It is a matter of pride with her to keep going as long as possible, and it is not unusual to find a bride dancing gaily after three days and nights of vigorous frolic. When a girl is dancing with a man she always holds his pipe. It would be regarded as extremely rude if a man should continue to smoke his pipe in such circumstances.

SCOTLAND'S DRUNKARDS.—Drunkenness in Scotland appears to be on the increase, according to the judicial statistics for 1906 just issued. In some instances the drunkenness reached absolutely appalling degrees. In the little town of Blairgowrie, in Perthshire, with a population of well under 5,000, the proportion of cases of drunkenness reached 1,042 per 10,000 of the population, or one case for every ten men, women, and children of the inhabitants.

A SILENT COUPLE.—James L. Williams, a hat-maker, of Danbury, Conn., and his wife have occupied the same house, taken their meals at the same table, and have been in each other's company almost continually for five years without speaking a word to each other. Five years ago they quarreled, and Williams made a vow that he would never again speak to his wife. He has kept it faithfully, and Mrs. Williams is now suing for a divorce.

CURIOS PUNISHMENT.—At Kotta, in Saxony, persons who fail to pay their taxes each year have their names published in a list which hangs up in all restaurants and saloons of the city. Those who are on the list must not be supplied with either meat or drink at these places, under penalty of loss of license.

COAL DRAY AS A HEARSE.—The funeral of Mr. Joseph Gibson, coal merchant, Sleaford, took place the other day. By his special request his coffin was drawn to the cemetery by a heavy horse attached to one his coal drays, the novel sight attracting a large number of spectators.

turn up, I will promise you that they shall give an account of themselves."

After the departure of the negro, Gasquoine turned to Mrs. Vance, and said:

"Now, then, you can speak plainly—who was it you saw hanging over that coffin?"

"I saw Frances, or her ghost."

"Do not name ghosts again. If you saw any one that resembled Frances, it was that girl herself."

"But not in the flesh—it was her spirit."

"You are getting to have very weak nerves, Mrs. Vance."

"But my eyesight is good yet; and did not I tell you that she struck me to insensibility by a wave of her ghostly hand?"

"By the wave of a handkerchief soaked with ether, I should say, judging by the odor I recognized upon entering this room."

"Great Heavens! Suppose it was she alive!"

"Why should you suppose her dead? We have had no reason to think so yet."

"Then, if she was alive, how did she dare to enter this house?"

"Simply because she never expected to be recognized."

"And what could her object have been?"

"You always rated that girl as a weak-minded child, Mrs. Vance; but I can tell you that she is deeper and braver than you imagine."

"Do you think that she suspects anything?" asked the housekeeper, in a low, husky whisper.

"Yes; she undoubtedly suspects something."

"What?"

"The truth, most likely."

"Then all our scheming and planning will go for naught."

"Not unless she discovers what we have failed to discover."

"The will?"

"Yes."

"Then you are satisfied that the old gentleman made a will?"

"I know that he did."

"And she is acknowledged?"

"Yes."

"And made heiress to all?"

"All, except a few thousands to my sister and myself, and a few hundreds to you."

"And, after all, we are to be defeated?"

"Not according to my ideas."

"But this girl?"

"Shall be in my power within forty-eight hours."

"But she may have told her story, and made friends, who will stand by her to fight us."

"If we could once find that will, we could defy her and all the friends that she might secure to assist her."

"But how about that masked man who tied and gagged the negro?"

Gasquoine advanced close to Mrs. Vance, and whispered something in her ear, when at the same moment a light tap was heard at the front door.

"Ah! they have come," said Gasquoine, as he passed out of the room.

"Heavens!" muttered the woman, audibly, "how cunning he is! There will be tearful scenes enacted under this roof to-night."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WOMEN are given to the habit of expressing their thoughts aloud.

Mrs. Vance was not an exception to this class of her sex.

During the brief moments that she was alone, by her mutterings she betrayed the fact that Gasquoine had a telegraphic wire connecting with a certain rendezvous, from whence he could summon assistance at any moment.

He had telegraphed a signal, and the result was that the rap upon the front door announced the arrival of the assistance that he had summoned in the above ingenious manner.

We have previously mentioned that while the above scenes were transpiring, once or twice a human shadow had been thrown upon the wall, and that occasionally a stern face, illuminated by a keen pair of eyes, was protruded beyond the partly closed folding doors.

Throughout the subsequent conversation between Mrs. Vance and Gasquoine, the same face might have been seen, but when the rap came at the front door, and after the tell-tale exclamations of the woman, it suddenly vanished.

In the meantime, Gasquoine had stolen on "to the street door, and in a loud voice asked:

"Who's there?"

The answer was a peculiar whistle, that came low, but distinct and clear.

The next instant Gasquoine opened the door, and admitted four men dressed in neat, dark clothes, and with slouched hats upon their heads.

The four strangers entered on tiptoe, and with a quiet, stealthy step.

All their movements indicated that they had come upon a secret and possibly sinister mission.

The movements of the man that admitted them were equally stealthy and suspicious. Quietly taking each by the hand, Gasquoine exchanged a signal implying extreme caution. A moment later he ushered them into the back room, which had just been vacated by Mrs. Vance.

The four new-comers were evidently foreigners, apparently Frenchmen, and about as villainous a looking set of fellows as one can imagine.

They all paid marked deference to Gasquoine, and the latter assumed toward each of them an air of commanding influence.

For a moment not a word was spoken.

The presence of the dead appeared to have a chilling influence upon the strangers; but after a moment Gasquoine said:

"You are all my sworn friends?"

An affirmative nod indicated the men's assent.

"I can rely upon you all?"

"You can," replied the leader, a tall, slender man, with peculiarly piercing eyes, and a remarkably firm and resolute face.

"I have enemies, and require your best services, for which I am willing to pay well."

"We come as brothers, not as hirelings."

Gasquoine now told a story of his own coining, in which he embodied the facts known to our readers concerning the appearance of the masked man and the female figure in white.

His narrative was intended to convey the impression that the man and woman were confederates, and that the whole affair was a game or conspiracy to rob him of the fortune left to him by his uncle, who was lying dead in his coffin in that very room.

"What has become of the masked man?" asked the tall man, speaking in French.

"I believe that he is yet concealed somewhere in this house."

"And the woman also?"

"Yes."

"And what is their object?"

"To murder my sister and myself."

Upon hearing this last declaration, the men each made significant motions, indicating what they would do to this masked man if they found him.

Gasquoine interpreted their pantomime as plainly as though they had spoken their intentions in words, and he said:

"Yes, they must be removed from my path. It is life to life. They would kill me—to save myself and sister, I must kill them."

A low-toned consultation now followed between the five men.

The most earnest speaker was the tall man, who evidently was the commanding spirit among them.

After some moments their further actions betrayed the fact that a thorough search was to be instantly instituted.

One of the men was stationed in the lower hall, while another was placed in the upper hall, the third man being ordered to remain in the parlors.

The object of this disposition of the three slouch-hatted men was to prevent the escape of any one from the house.

After some further instructions to his men, the tall fellow drew a pistol from his pocket, examined and cocked it, and then nodding to Gasquoine, said:

"Come—I am ready!"

The two men passed from the parlors, and advanced to the foot of the stairs leading to the second floor, when suddenly, with a face pale and more rigid even than that of the supposed ghost, Mrs. Vance appeared, descending the stairs.

She was evidently so terrified that she did not observe Gasquoine and his companion until she was close to them.

Instantly, in a husky whisper, she said:

"Some one has been in my room, searching my bureau-drawer, within the last hour."

"Ha!" exclaimed Gasquoine. "Then our game is still in the house, and escape is impossible."

With stealthy steps the two men ascended the stairs, followed by the woman Mrs. Vance.

The latter's room was the rear room on the third floor.

The door was open, and the party entered noiselessly.

The Frenchman was in the advance, Gasquoine came next, and the housekeeper last.

The two first were already within the room, when suddenly the woman gave utterance to a piercing shriek, and fell fainting upon the hall floor, before the open door-way.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEFORE explaining the occasion of the housekeeper's piercing shriek, we will give our readers some account of the movements of the mysterious man in the mask who had bound and gagged the colored man.

It is useless for us to attempt to conceal the fact that the seeming midnight robber and assassin was none other than our cool-headed, steady-handed, strong-nerved, and brave-hearted friend, Old Sleuth.

Although it may appear that this famous man was comparatively idle in working out the mystery, those of our readers who go with us to the end will discover that he had been busy all the time, as well as one other noted detective who thus far has not seemingly been taking any part in our former chapters.

It was not a mystery to Sleuth, the fact that Gasquoine kept all strangers from the house during the time that his uncle's body remained beneath the roof.

In fact, knowing facts which have not yet been revealed to our readers, he was surprised upon discovering even the old negro there.

Our readers have also divined that the old Irishman who came for his buck and saw, and held a conversation with a kitchen-servant, was the detective in a favorite rôle.

The allusion to the ghost during that little talk, was a valuable piece of information to the officer.

He had already partially determined to make a tour through the house, if possible, and this little incident at once fixed his resolution to do so.

He had well calculated his chances when he adjusted the windows so as to favor admittance, while the negro was cunningly kept down-stairs to eat his lunch.

The detective had little hope of meeting with the ghost in person, as he did not believe that the apparition would make a second visit, but he did have great expectations of finding some little clew that would let him a bit into the object of the ghost's visit.

The practical detective had an idea that even ghosts had an object in visiting dead people in their coffins, and he was exceedingly anxious to discover what the purpose was of this particular lady in white.

We have already related how he succeeded in gaining an entrance into the house, and how he secured the sable watcher of the corpse.

After leaving the room, as described, the detective, who had come prepared for a stealthy movement about the house, removed his outer shoes, and stood in a pair of oiled moccasins.

Ascending the stairs noiselessly, he passed along to the third story, and was about continuing his way, for certain reasons, to the attic, when he was startled by beholding a strange figure standing directly at the top of the stairs.

The officer's heart thumped wildly upon beholding this strange figure in white, for, bold matter-of-fact man as he was, he could not prevent a cold shudder from crawling over his frame, and a chill from quivering through his veins, as his eyes rested upon those pale, rigid features.

Had the figure vanished, Old Sleuth's courage would have at once returned, as he would have made up his mind that it was the living he was gazing upon.

When, instead of vanishing, he beheld the weird lady, with her glazed eyes fixed upon him, boldly start to descend the stairs, he felt his heart turn suddenly into a lump of ice, as it were.

As noiselessly the white lady descended the stairs, and drew nearer to him, the detective instinctively drew back to allow her to pass.

Down she glided, as unconscious, seemingly, of his presence as though he were not there, until within arm's length, when, suddenly raising her hand, in which was a white cambric handkerchief, she waved it in his face, when Old

Sleuth felt a certain strange sensation come over him, and at once he sunk helpless and insensible upon the hall floor.

When the detective recovered his consciousness the figure had vanished.

How long he had lain unconscious he had no means of knowing—in fact, he could not even guess.

Everything about was still, yet plainly visible by means of a hall gas-jet which flickered at the head of the stairs, and whose light had enabled him to see the features of the white lady so plainly that he at once recognized their resemblance to the picture that he had of the adopted daughter of the old millionaire.

Had the detective been less impressed by the ghost-like appearance of the figure, he might have been more suspicious; but, for once in his life of varied experience, the nerve was completely knocked out of him.

A strange, weird feeling had come over him that he had witnessed a supernatural vision.

Connecting this last startling incident with a former one led him to arrive at certain conclusions not compatible with his usual cool-headedness.

But he had another purpose yet to fulfill, and though one part of his programme was marred, he was none the less determined to carry out the other.

While still standing in the hallway, he heard a movement in one of the adjacent rooms, and his natural caution caused him to step behind the partition of the attic stairway.

He was not a moment too soon, as in the same breath he heard a room door open, and upon peeping around the partition, he saw a female form pass out of one of the rooms and slowly descend the stairs.

He did not see the face of this last female, but by her form he judged her to be Mrs. Vance, the housekeeper.

As the form passed down the stairs the detective muttered:

"This suits me exactly! I have this floor to myself now, unless that woman in white may be lurking around somewhere."

Leaving his hiding-place, he moved along the hall, and entered cautiously the room that Mrs. Vance had just vacated.

He had a few moments before removed his mask, but he now put it on again, and crossing the room, commenced an unceremonious search of the housekeeper's bureau-drawers.

The first article which rewarded his search, which appeared to give him any particular satisfaction, was a bundle of letters.

A glance at one of these showed him a simple signature.

The contents of the note were unimportant, but the initials signed at the bottom indicated that some of them might prove more.

"My friend V. G., I will take the liberty of perusing your missives at some future time," muttered the detective, as he shoved the letters into his pocket.

He again commenced to rummage the drawers, when suddenly his eye fell upon a partly written note, in a female hand, that caused him to utter an exclamation of delight.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE contents of the partly written note which the detective found, were as follows:

"MY FRIEND,—I received your last note, and was surprised that you should resort to a threat to intimidate me!

"You can adopt means more effectual with me than threats, *viz.*, a sufficient guarantee of the fulfillment of your part of our contract; you may as well believe at once that I can not be frightened and that I will not be cheated.

"I have fulfilled my part of our bargain to the letter, and have laid myself liable to be followed by a *dying face the rest of my days!* My life may be haunted, and my share of the proceeds will only serve to enable me to fly from the scene of my guilt.

"As to the bonds, mark me! the rack, nor the prison—not even the gallows will compel or terrify me into giving up possession of them until—

Here the letter abruptly stopped, as though the writer had been interrupted.

The importance of the document was such that old Sleuth already felt as though he had the bonds really in his grasp.

Muttering to himself, Sleuth said, repeating a portion of the letter, and commenting upon it at the same time.

"So, so; it will require a portion of the proceeds to carry you from the *scene of your guilt?* This clause tells how that single hair came to rest upon the spoon with which the poisonous draught was mixed that that unsuspecting old man drank of to die! And again: 'The gallows will not compel or terrify me into giving up possession of them until—' Oh!" resumed the detective, musingly. "So you are the smartest man of the two, eh, Mrs. Vance? You are the thief first and the murderer afterward, eh? Well, well, this is a good night's work; and now we will see whether or not Old Sleuth can not terrify you into giving up before 'until' comes around, like next Christmas."

The detective crumpled up the paper, and was about putting it in his pocket, along with the letters, when he was startled by hearing a piercing shriek come from below stairs.

Quickly he decided.

He saw that it would not do just at present to keep the note.

As long as he knew its contents, the note was of no service, as it was unaddressed and unsigned.

The letter he decided to keep.

Tossing the note back to where he had first found it, he glided from the room, and moved swiftly down the stairs.

Upon reaching the parlor floor, he heard voices in the rear room, and at once proceeded to the front room, and, taking a convenient position, was an attentive listener to the conversation between Mrs. Vance and Gasquoine, as detailed in a previous chapter.

Upon hearing the signal-rap at the street door, a man with less nerves than the detective would have made an exit from the house at once.

The detective, on the contrary, had encountered too much success thus far to think of such a thing.

He waited just long enough to hear the housekeeper betray the possible character of the newcomers, when, with a reckless boldness and disregard of the risks, he reentered the stairs.

Again he came near being discovered, as just as he arrived at the top of the stairs he heard Mrs. Vance come from the rear parlor and ascend after him.

The detective tried the knob of the front hall bedroom.

Fortunately, it yielded to his hand, and shoving open the door, he entered the room, intending to wait until the housekeeper had passed on upstairs.

A strange fortune appeared to attend Sleuth's every movement upon this eventful night.

He had no sooner closed the door of the little front hall room than he became aware that the room was already occupied.

His position was now perilous indeed.

The least outcry would betray his presence to the five armed assassins below stairs.

There was no light in the room, and he could not distinctly see any one, and yet he had a weird consciousness that there was some one there.

There was no time to be lost; drawing a Bowie-knife from his belt, he moved toward the window, when suddenly the blind was thrown open, and there, by the aid of the dim light from the street, he beheld the form of the white lady, the same who had passed him after striking him to unconsciousness at the foot of the attic stairs.

Instantly the brave detective, who had faced death a hundred times without feeling the quiver of a nerve, felt a strange sensation of nervousness come over him.

He tried to speak, but found himself unable to articulate a syllable.

The figure moved toward him.

Sleuth had not even the power to slink away; and once again that ghostly hand was waved before his face, and a second time he fell to the floor in a state of insensibility.

When consciousness returned as before, he discovered that the white lady had vanished.

A sudden suspicion now flashed through the detective's mind.

Suddenly his eye fell upon an article lying upon the floor.

He picked it up and examined it, and at once his suspicions were confirmed.

"I'm an old jackass!" was Sleuth's emphatic and indignant exclamation, as he restored his knife to his belt.

After a moment he added:

"The next time I run across Miss White Lady, I reckon that I will solve one of the weird mysteries of this house."

Advancing to the window, he saw that the blind had been closed again.

He took it upon himself to reopen it, and make an examination of the surroundings.

He discovered that the window opened upon a continuous portico that overhung the parlor windows of the two adjacent houses.

"That settles it, and will serve for future observations," remarked the officer, as he pulled to the blinds and moved back to the door, and listened.

He heard nothing, and stepping out into the hall, ascended a second time to the third story.

He forced the door of the housekeeper's room open, but the apartment was vacant.

He was about to enter the room to continue his search, when he heard voices in the lower hall.

Leaning over the baluster, he listened.

He recognized the housekeeper's voice.

He heard her say that her room had been entered within the hour.

The detective also heard the response to this communication from the two men.

Having a pretty accurate knowledge now of the different apartments of the several inmates of the house, he passed to the front room adjoining the one occupied by the housekeeper, and entered it.

While walking and listening, he partly drew the door open just at the moment that Mrs. Vance was following the two men into her own room.

The woman caught a glimpse of his shadow, and screamed as described.

CHAPTER XXVI.

As the housekeeper had fainted, it was some moments before her two companions could discover what had startled her.

Gasquoine was very much excited, but the tall man took the matter quite coolly.

"What made her screech?" asked the latter.

"I do not know, hang her!" responded Gasquoine; "but I wish she wouldn't always lose her senses just at the moment when she has the most need of them!"

"Women are not as strong as men," said the slouched-hat man.

"This woman ought to be; she has had experience enough."

"Experience of what nature?" asked the tall man innocently.

"All women of her age must have had considerable experience," was the equivocal reply.

The tall man stepped to the wash stand, and taking some water in his hands, proceeded to resuscitate Mrs. Vance.

The housekeeper's fainting fits were like a cat's naps, frequent, but of short duration.

She was speedily brought around, when Gasquoine asked, impatiently:

"Well, madam, what did you see this time that frightened you so?"

"A shadow on the opposite wall!" she replied.

"It strikes me that you see nothing else but ghosts and shadows lately."

"It was the shadow of a man!"

"Where did you see it?"

"He is in that trout room."

Gasquoine's face was perfectly livid, and he fairly hissed:

"That is definite, certainly!" and he moved, stiletto in hand, toward the door of the room indicated, when the tall man placed his hand on the other's shoulder, and said, with a significant nod:

"Let me search that room. You remain with the woman."

Gasquoine was not a coward. On the contrary, physically he was a remarkably brave and nervy man, no matter what his defects might be morally.

Still, he at once saw the propriety of permitting his friend and confederate to enter the room instead of himself, and drawing back, allowed the other to pass him.

"Lower the gas!" said the tall man, in a low tone.

Gasquoine did as commanded when Mrs. Vance said:

"I will go down-stairs," adding with a slight smile. "Would to Heaven that I had left this house a month ago!"

Upon hearing this latter exclamation, Gasquoine seized her roughly by the shoulder, and leaning over, whispered:

"Deliver what you have concealed and you can leave as soon as you please, madam!"

In the meantime, the tall man, after drawing his dagger, had entered the room from whence

had come the reflection of the shadow of a man upon the wall.

A moment passed—a moment of terrible suspense to Gasquoine.

Mrs. Vance had already descended the stairs, and the Frenchman, who had planned and plotted for a certain purpose, stood alone in the darkness in the hall.

The moments appeared as hours.

All was silent; not a sound was heard—not even the steps of the tall man, moving around knife in hand in the room where the intruder was supposed to be; and yet every moment Gasquoine expected to hear the sound of a struggle, or what would have pleased and gratified him still more, the fall of a heavy body upon the floor.

This blood-thirsty man was disappointed.

After full five minutes had passed the tall man came forth from the room and said:

"Turn up the gas. There is no one in that room. The woman must have been deceived by her imagination."

Gasquoine turned up the gas as requested and at the same time he muttered:

"All this is very strange! There is a man in this house. He has been seen by two persons and yet he appears to have a way of concealing himself from me."

"You are surrounded by persons with very lively fancies; I guess that that is the secret of all of this sight-seeing."

"I would like to search that room myself," said Gasquoine.

"You have that privilege, of course," was the answer, in a peculiar tone, as though the speaker was slightly huffed at the idea that another should think that he could find what he could not.

Gasquoine moved as though to enter the front room, when the tall man said:

"You must take the intruder, whoever he was, to be a greater fool than I do, when you suspect for a moment that he has not already left the house."

"How would he get out?"

"The same way that he got in, most likely, as it is not probable that he would have remained when he knew that you had been aroused, and had four armed men to assist you. Come, let's look into this room, and find out whether or not anything is missing, as the masked man most likely was only a common burglar."

This conversation, as related, was carried on in the French language, and when the tall man had expressed his opinion he pushed open the door of the housekeeper's room, and added:

"Come, let's look in here."

The two men entered the room, and after a moment's glance the tall man said:

"This matter is plain enough; the masked man was an ordinary midnight robber."

As the latter spoke his eye fell upon the partially written note that Old Sleuth had perused with such eager avidity.

Taking it in his hand, he was reading it, when Gasquoine, who had just caught a glance at its contents, reached forward to take it from him.

The tall man resisted the movement, and folding up the note, placed it in his vest-pocket.

"Give that note to me," said Gasquoine.

"Why?" asked the tall man, carelessly.

"Because you have no right to keep it," was the quick answer.

"See here, monsieur," replied the tall man.

"I have read that note."

"Well, what if you have?"

"I have learned a secret."

"One that you have no right to learn."

"No; I do not mean a secret contained in the note, but another one."

"What is it?"

"That you are playing false."

"How?"

"You are playing for a stake, and have not let the rest of your brothers in for a share."

"It is false!" exclaimed Gasquoine; and drawing his pistol, he aimed it at the tall man's head, and said, while his face turned purple with rage:

"Give me that note that you have just placed in your vest-pocket!"

"Not at the muzzle of your pistol!" was the reply. "You forget that there are three friends below stairs!"

"I must have that note!"

"You are welcome to it, as I am bound to take your word when you say that you are not playing against the rest of us."

As the tall man spoke he backed back the

note, and as he did so a peculiar smile played over his features, the meaning of which shall be interpreted for the benefit of our readers before the end of our story—it had a meaning, and a very important one.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT the conclusion of the very suggestive little incident described in the previous chapter the other three men who had come with the tall man were ordered to search the house from top to bottom.

A most thorough search was made—every room and closet was critically examined, but not the slightest sign of an intruder could be discovered, and it was daylight when the four men finally left the house.

Four days passed.

The funeral of old Mr. Gasquoine had taken place.

Everything was conducted upon the occasion with the utmost decorum, and the few old business friends of the deceased who attended the obsequies little dreamed of the real truth concerning the fearful tragedy that had happened beneath that roof.

A will was offered for probate wherein Victor Gasquoine was made sole heir, save a few thousand bequeathed to his sister.

The amount of property proved was large, but, singularly enough, the deceased's personal estate was represented as very small.

No allusion was made to missing bonds in accounting, and yet it was discovered that the singular old man was the possessor of over four millions.

There was no suspicion of fraud.

Everything appeared straight and regular, and no opposition was offered to the proving of the will presented for probate.

Victor Gasquoine was now a millionaire, and was flattered accordingly, none suspecting but what he had come honestly by his immense possessions, and the idea of any other more rightful heir was not even thought of.

Two days after the funeral the new-made millionaire was seated in the parlor, when one of the new servants whom he had introduced into the house announced that a gentleman wished to see him.

"Learn the gentleman's name," said Gasquoine.

The servant returned in a few moments with a card, bearing the legend, "Sleuth, detective."

"A detective!" exclaimed Gasquoine, in a startled undertone. "What in thunder does a detective want to see me about?" and his face was livid with consternation.

Addressing the servant, after a moment, Gasquoine said:

"Tell Mr. Sleuth that I am busy to-day, and can not see any one."

Again the servant returned with the information that the detective said that his business was important, and that it was necessary that he should see Mr. Gasquoine at once.

The rich man finally consented to see the famous solver of mysteries, and a moment later a neatly dressed plain-looking old man was ushered into his presence.

Gasquoine assumed a pompous and independent air, as though he wished to impress the detective with the idea that he had but little time to spare.

Sleuth's action indicated, on the contrary, that he was in no hurry, and proposed to take things easily.

As Gasquoine did not ask the detective to be seated, the latter helped himself to a chair, and drawing it up before the new master of the house, seated himself, and said:

"I had some business with your late uncle which was not concluded at the time of his death."

"What was the nature of that business, sir?"

"Professional, of course. You will recognize by my card that I am a detective."

"So I perceive; and as I am the successor of my uncle, you will please state precisely the nature of your business."

"Some months ago your uncle was robbed of a large sum in bonds."

"I am aware of that, and I suppose you were employed to recover them?"

"Exactly."

"Well, you have come to tell me that you have not succeeded in recovering the lost bonds?"

"I have not recovered them yet."

"I am not surprised at that, simply because

I have recovered them myself."

"Then my services in that direction are at an end!"

"I should say so."

That old expression of countenance, peculiar to Sleuth when about to say something startling in a quiet way, now flashed across his features, as he declared, in clear, deliberate tones:

"I say differently."

"What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed Gasquoine, indignantly.

"I mean that the bonds have not been recovered. As your uncle's heir you have a perfect right to discharge me from your service, but you have no right to lie!"

"Are you aware, sir, to whom you are talking?"

"Perfectly! I am speaking to Mr. Gasquoine—a man who was formerly a gambler, who is at present linked by terrible oaths to several gangs of professional thieves."

"I certainly can not complain of a want of frankness on your part."

"No, sir; I am generally pretty plain-spoken."

"You have certainly shown your hand in this little game."

"So much the better for you, if we are to play against each other."

We have before intimated that Gasquoine was not a coward personally.

He felt, upon the present occasion, so well assured of his position, and the crowning success of his scheme, that he was not disposed to be intimidated, and said, carelessly:

"Victor Gasquoine was a gambler, and may be still, and he can better afford to play now; but as to being linked with professional thieves, that is false!"

"What you were, or are, has nothing to do with the business that brought me here, sir."

"Ah! I recollect that you were employed to recover those stolen bonds."

"Yes, sir."

"Excuse me for not understanding the object of your visit sooner. I suppose you have a bill against the estate for your past services? What is the amount?"

"I have no bill against the estate; payment for services was conditional."

"What were the conditions?"

"I was to receive a certain amount in the event of success in recovering the stolen property."

"Well, sir, to prove that I hold no ill-will for the insulting manner in which you have contradicted me, I will say, that as the bonds have been recovered, that in discharging you I will pay you for what trouble you have been to."

"You can pay me nothing, Gasquoine," said Sleuth, sharply.

"Very well, sir; and as my time is precious, we will consider our interview at an end."

"I have not stated all my business yet."

"Well, sir, state it, but be brief."

"In the first place, I shall not consider myself discharged until those bonds are recovered. If I succeed in recovering them, I shall claim every dollar in payment agreed upon between your late uncle and myself."

"You are a strange man, Sleuth."

"I have often been told that."

"Why do you persist in saying that those bonds have not been recovered, when I tell you that I have them already in my possession?"

"Because I know that you are not telling the truth."

"Be careful, sir. I might forget that you are an old man, and resent your insults by throwing you out of the window."

"Oh, no you won't! Your heart's in your mouth now! You know that I have something unpleasant to tell you, and you don't want to hear it!"

"You're playing a game, old man, but you have made a miserable mistake; you don't understand the character of the man you're playing against! I have taken too many desperate chances for a dollar in my time to scare easy."

"When you get ready we will proceed to business," said Sleuth.

"I am ready now."

"I am on the track of those bonds now," said the detective, abruptly, "and I am going to gain possession of them inside of forty-eight hours, as sure as you are born."

This last startling declaration of the detective knocked the self-possession clean out of Gasquoine.

The latter turned pale, his lips quivered, and his voice was tremulous, as he exclaimed:

"You're on the track of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whom do you suspect?" asked Gasquoine, excitedly.

"Ah, my friend," said Sleuth, with a quiet laugh, "you ain't quite so certain, after all, of having recovered those bonds."

"Tell me who you suspect! I may yet employ you to recover them, according to my late uncle's stipulation."

"Well, I suspect three notorious scoundrels, whom I am pretty certain put up the job."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Gasquoine, while Sleuth uttered a low, confident laugh.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THOSE of our readers who are acquainted with Old Sleuth's characteristics, through former narratives, will readily perceive that when the great detective told Gasquoine that he did not have the bonds, that he was only playing a point.

In fact, the officer thought that possibly the man had managed to compromise with the real thief.

Thus the object of Sleuth's questions and confident assertions was only a mode of "piping" for the truth.

His success was gratifying; his well-aimed shot that he was on the track of the lost bonds knocked the rests from under Gasquoine and slid him right down into the waters of truth.

When the man exclaimed "Thank God!" in answer to the detective's bold asseveration, the latter knew at once that he had judged rightly, had aimed a good shot, although fired at random, and the bonds were yet unrecovered.

A moment's silence followed the exclamations with which we closed our preceding chapter, broken at length by Gasquoine, who asked:

"Are you sure that you are on the right track?"

"Yes, I am sure that I am on the right track!" answered Sleuth, with one of those quiet and significant nods peculiar to him.

A second interval of silence followed, a second time broken by Gasquoine, who said:

"You may wonder at the fact of my wishing to have you to understand that the bonds were recovered?"

"No, I do not wonder at anything. Men in my profession daily encounter such singular occurrences that we soon cease to be astonished at anything," was Sleuth's equivocal reply.

You were a stranger to me, and I purposed employing a detective with whom I was acquainted."

"You are at perfect liberty to employ a dozen, if you choose, but I am bound to continue the search for those bonds until they are found."

"I have concluded, upon after-thought, to employ you only," said Gasquoine.

"I am already employed."

"But not as yet by me."

"No, but by the estate."

"You must recognize me, sir, if you expect any payment for your services."

"I shall recognize you only as far as it suits my purposes."

It appears to me that you intend carrying on matters with a high hand. You may be brought up with a short turn, my old friend!" exclaimed Gasquoine, with a return of his former nerve and boldness."

"Have you made any efforts lately to learn the whereabouts of the late Mr. Gasquoine's daughter?" asked Sleuth, with his characteristic abruptness.

"You refer to Mr. Gasquoine's adopted daughter?" said the heir, again showing signs of nervousness.

"No; I refer to the heir-at-law—Mr. Gasquoine's daughter."

"Mr. Gasquoine had no daughter."

"Oh!" said Sleuth, carelessly. "Were you one of those who supposed that Miss Frances Gasquoine was only an adopted daughter?"

"The young lady to whom you refer was not even a relation of my late uncle."

"You think so, eh?"

"I know so!"

"Then I must say that you are laboring under another mistake."

"No, sir, I am not; but you are when you think that you can continue to brow-beat and bully me in this manner!"

"I am not trying to brow-beat or bully any one. It is not necessary in this case. I fully understand my premises, and I am speaking from the book."

"It strikes me that you and I have met before, now that I recollect," suddenly exclaimed Gasquoine.

"Where did we meet, sir?"

"In a certain gambling-saloon."

"Your recollection serves you truly—we did."

"Then I owe you one!" exclaimed Gasquoine, suddenly clapping his hand to his pistol-pocket.

"Don't raise your hand, my young friend," said Sleuth, a menacing expression lighting up his face; at the same time he nodded suggestively.

This movement did not intimidate Gasquoine, however, for in an instant his hand was withdrawn, and he was on the point of raising his weapon, when, by a lightning-like movement, the detective suddenly seized both of his hands, and in less time than is required to tell it, snapped a pair of handcuffs upon them, leaving the baffled man to glare in helpless impotence.

"How is that for high?" remarked Sleuth, with a chuckle, as he resumed his seat, and smiled complacently upon his victim.

For a moment Gasquoine was too overcome by surprise and chagrin to speak; but at length, gaining voice, he exclaimed, while grinding his teeth with rage:

"You will regret this outrage for the remainder of your life."

"Oh, no; I never was better pleased in my life!" replied Sleuth, adding: "Now I can talk with you without feeling at any moment I may be assassinated. You see, Gasquoine, I am well acquainted with you and your little peculiarities."

"You are a robber! But mind you, I can summon help in an instant. Unbind me, or I will call!"

"You dare not!"

"I dare not? Why?"

"Because you have come to the conclusion that I have got you down to a fine point; you are too great a villain, and you know that I am aware of it!"

"We will see!" exclaimed Gasquoine, and he called loudly for one of his servants by name.

The expression upon Sleuth's face now became terrible, as he said, in low, clear, distinct tones:

"Dismiss that servant at once when he comes—or I will arrest you and Mrs. Vance at once for murder!"

Gasquoine's nerves upon hearing this fearful charge forsook him entirely.

His face became perfectly livid, and he trembled visibly, as he asked, in a quaking voice:

"Arrest me for the murder of whom?"

"Your uncle!"

At this instant a man-servant entered the room.

Concealing his hands so that the handcuffs would not show, Gasquoine said, with wonderful steadiness of voice under the circumstances:

"Bretta, bring me some brandy and water for two."

The servant wheeled about quickly and left the room, when Gasquoine added, addressing Sleuth:

"Disarm me and remove these handcuffs."

Sleuth did as requested, at the same time remarking:

"I see you recognize my power."

"I recognize nothing," replied Gasquoine.

At this moment the man-servant returned with a tray, on which was a bottle, two glasses, and a small silver pitcher, filled with water.

"You can go," said Gasquoine to his servant, and to Sleuth he added: "Now, sir, we will come right down to business."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"THAT is just what I have wanted to do all this time," said Sleuth.

"Well, speak plainly now; let there be no more mouthing about it. What is your game?"

"I want justice and right—nothing more and nothing less."

"You are not speaking plainly now, that is certain. For whom do you claim justice? and from whom?"

"I claim justice from you, and for Frances Gasquoine."

"There is no such person as Frances Gasquoine."

"You know better, and so do I."

"From whom did you acquire your information?"

"Her father."

"Who was he?"

"Your uncle!"

"It's false!"

"You are not ready to talk *business* yet, I see."

"Not upon those premises."

"We can talk upon no other."

"Suppose, for argument sake, I admit your suggestion concerning this girl, what do you claim for her?"

"I claim her father's estate, which you have gained possession of by means of *murder* and *forgery*!"

"Whom did I murder?"

"Her father."

"I am only asking these questions to discover the details of your game, Mr. Sleuth, as you call yourself."

"All right. I don't care what your motives are, so long as I gain what I am seeking to gain."

"In what manner did I commit forgery?" asked Gasquoine.

"The will that you presented to the court was a forged one."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, all that I have got to say to you is go on and play out your game. This is a very pretty conspiracy, and I suppose that the girl my uncle picked from the streets is at the bottom of it."

"It makes little difference who's at the bottom. I want to ask you one direct question—are you prepared to recognize this young lady's claims and do her justice?"

"I am prepared to do her justice."

"In what manner?"

"By handing her over to the police the moment I discover her whereabouts."

"Remember that at a word from me the police are ready to arrest you for murder and forgery."

"I'll take those chances; and now that I know just what game you are playing, suppose I invite you to leave my house."

"Then you refuse to treat?"

"I refuse to recognize conspirators."

"Then it is war between the right and wrong."

"Believing that there is to be an attempt made to wrong me, I reply yes."

"I warn you, Gasquoine," said Sleuth, as he rose from his chair, "that you are playing against the gallows."

"And you and your gang are playing against state prison, and I have the money to fight with."

"You won't have it long; we will be down upon you for that."

"All right. Go and proceed with your game."

Sleuth moved toward the door, and had his hand upon the knob, when the latter was turned from the opposite side, the door opened, and Mrs. Vance entered the room.

The detective stepped back to allow her to pass, when she advanced, and, placing her hand upon his arm, said, in a low, nervous tone of voice:

"Be seated one moment, sir."

"Madam, you will allow that man to depart, if you please," exclaimed Gasquoine, rising from his seat and gesticulating violently.

"One moment, Mr. Gasquoine," said the late housekeeper.

"Well, speak quickly!" cried Gasquoine, excitedly. "What do you want to say?"

"All I want to say is that maybe it might be well to hear what proposition the man has to make in behalf of this young pretender—this girl who claims to be your cousin."

As Mrs. Vance spoke she managed to convey a signal to Gasquoine, which the latter readily interpreted.

"Why should we listen to any proposition from people whom we know to be conspirators?"

"It certainly can not advance their cause, the mere statement of what they wish to gain."

"What we wish to gain can be briefly stated," said Sleuth.

"Well, state your claim."

"We want only what is right and just."

"What do you consider right and just?"

"Every dollar left by Mr. Gasquoine—his property, both real and personal."

"You intend to play for a big stake," said Gasquoine, with a sneer.

"You are playing for a bigger one—you are playing for life and liberty, added to money obtained by murder and forgery."

As Sleuth uttered these words he passed out of the door and left the house.

When the detective had gone, Mrs. Vance turned to Gasquoine and said:

"This is just what I anticipated. We are ruined."

Gasquoine laughed sardonically, as he replied:

"All danger can be removed if you will only act like a sensible woman."

"And how shall I act, pray?" asked Mrs. Vance.

"Surrender what you have in your possession."

Instantly a strange expression flashed over the woman's face, as she exclaimed:

"How deep and subtle you are, Victor Gasquoine; but you will find that I am your match."

"There is no matching about it. You hold in your hands spoils of a robbery, and you are only asked to surrender them to the rightful owner."

"That is so. Suppose I do surrender it to the rightful owner, Victor Gasquoine, how much will you have to surrender also?"

"I will not stand these taunts and insinuations much longer, madam!" exclaimed Gasquoine, his face turning purple with rage and fury.

"Nor will I stand your procrastination much longer. If you wish to recover possession of those bonds, fulfill your original agreement, and they are yours."

At this instant the room door opened, and the tall man who had led the search for the masked robber a few nights previously appeared in the doorway.

"Ah, Verac!" exclaimed Gasquoine, "I wish that you had come a few moments sooner."

"Why?" asked Verac.

"Because a man has just left this house who is the leader of a conspiracy to rob me."

"Do you mean the detective, Sleuth?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"I have had some business with him. He is a dangerous man—a hard man to have pitted against you."

As Verac made this assertion he fastened his eyes upon Mrs. Vance to watch the effect of his statement upon her.

The effect was very striking; the woman turned deathly pale, at the same time murmuring:

"Great Heavens! is that famous man pitted against us? If so, we are lost!"

There was something strangely suggestive in Verac's tones as he asked:

"Why should that man be pitted against you?"

"I will explain why," said Gasquoine, as he signaled to Mrs. Vance to leave the room.

After the latter had obeyed, Gasquoine said:

"You recollect that I told you once that my uncle had an adopted daughter?"

"Yes."

"Well, it appears that this girl has set up a claim that she was my late uncle's real child, and has secured the services of this man Sleuth to back her up in this preposterous claim."

"Well, is it a false one?"

Gasquoine flashed an indignant glance upon Verac as he replied:

"Is it a false claim? Yes! My uncle never had a relative in the world save my father and his children."

"Then this claim should give you but little uneasiness."

"I do not care that for it!" replied Gasquoine, snapping his fingers.

Then, after a moment, a thought appeared to strike him, and he added, lowering his voice:

"Would you like to be rich, Verac?"

"Yes."

"Would you dare to take some pretty risky chances if your money was sure?"

"I might."

"Blood, for instance, wouldn't scare you off?"

"Not from anything I had set out to do."

CHAPTER XXX.

A LONG conversation followed between the two men, carried on in an undertone.

When the conversation terminated it was evident that some terrible compact had been entered upon between them.

The faces of both men were pale and excited, and a strange light flashed in their eyes.

Shortly afterward Verac left the house and walked away, but upon reaching the corner he

entered a restaurant that was situated there, and taking a position near the window looking out upon the side street, seated himself.

There was something exceedingly suspicious about this man's manner.

His glance was fixed upon the Gasquoine residence as though he expected some one to come forth from there.

An hour passed, and save once, when he had gone to the bar to get a cigar, this man had not left the window, but had remained with his gaze fastened immovably upon the house mentioned.

At length his watch was rewarded.

A woman came from the house and passed by the street.

Verac waited until she had turned the corner, when he did a very remarkable thing.

He removed a wig from under his slouched hat, a pair of false whiskers from his face, drew another hat from his pocket, and donned it, and then turned his coat inside out, and put it on again.

The coat was a double one, and when changed presented a covering entirely different from what it had previously appeared.

In fact, in a few brief seconds the man's appearance was so completely changed that a person who might have seen him enter the restaurant would never have recognized him when he came out.

Before he had looked like a rowdyish sort of a fellow.

Now he had the perfect appearance of a gentleman.

Immediately upon completing this transformation Verac passed out from the saloon, and started to go in the same direction that had been taken by the woman who had come forth from the Gasquoine residence.

In following her he was compelled to go down and pass the house from which she had come.

Upon arriving opposite this house, the hall door opened, and Victor Gasquoine came forth.

The latter looked across the street directly at Verac, who was passing, but seemingly failed to recognize the outwardly transformed man.

On the contrary, Verac recognized Gasquoine, and was evidently annoyed at seeing him come forth thus, as it appeared, very inopportune.

Gasquoine stood a moment upon the stoop, looking alternately both up and down the street, until his glance chanced to rest upon the woman Verac had started to follow, just as she turned the corner two squares distant, when he immediately started after her at a rapid pace.

"Mon Dieu!" muttered Verac, in French. "That man is on the same track. Who is he watching—the woman or me?"

Gasquoine just at that moment, in fact, did not appear to be watching any one, but continued to increase his pace, as though he were walking on a wager.

After waiting for Gasquoine to get some distance in the advance, Verac started to walk at a rapid pace also.

Thus the parties continued, passing square after square.

Gasquoine would regulate his pace so as to keep the woman in sight, while Verac managed to keep on the track of both of them.

As before stated, square after square was passed over, until Verac exclaimed to himself:

"That woman either knows that she is being dogged, or, fearing that she may be, is taking the precaution to hide her steps, if possible."

The Frenchman, whose motives appeared strange and remarkable, considering his relations to Gasquoine, finally relying upon his disguise, determined to close up close to the woman, lest by some neat dodge she might manage to give him the slip.

His eagerness to keep her in sight was backed by a strong motive, as betrayed by the exclamation, as he hastened after her:

"It's now or never! That woman means mischief of some kind, that is certain!"

The forethought of Verac was almost immediately justified.

The woman, as she neared a certain corner, increased her pace almost to a run, and upon turning the corner suddenly darted into the area-way of a plain brick house and disappeared.

Gasquoine was half a block distant when she performed this maneuver, but Verac was just turning the corner, and was in season to note the house that she had entered.

At this moment the Frenchman proved that he was no tyro at the dogging business, by merely "piping" the house, and passing right along as though he had no special interest in anything in that particular neighborhood.

Upon reaching the further corner, however, he stopped, and taking a position from whence he could see down the street, through the two windows of a drug store, stood and watched.

As he turned about, he saw Gasquoine standing in the center of the square, looking about in puzzled and perplexed manner.

"Ha!" exclaimed Verac, with a low, satisfied chuckle. "That woman was too smart for Gasquoine, but not quite tricky enough for me."

Gasquoine walked the length of the square, and looked up and down the adjacent streets.

He subsequently accosted two men at different points and made inquiries.

Seeming completely baffled, he slowly walked away and disappeared.

"That's the ticket," muttered the tall man, who had been watching through the drug store windows, adding: "Now the game is between Mrs. Vance and me; and if she gets out of sight, she will have wings to fly away with, that's all!"

This last expression fell from the man's lips in excellent English for a Frenchman.

An hour passed, and no one came forth from the house into which Mrs. Vance had dodged, when Verac, who had waited so patiently before, now became somewhat impatient.

"I wonder if the little game is being played in that house?" he mused, adding, after a moment, "if it is, it is time for me to see about getting in there."

Glancing into the drug store, he saw that it was kept by a German, when he entered, and after purchasing some trifling article, said, in excellent German:

"Are you acquainted with the family living at No. 400?"

The fact of the question being asked in his native tongue won the apothecary's confidence at once.

In answer to the question, the druggist shook his head, and assuming a knowing expression, replied:

"That house is under the surveillance of the police."

"Indeed! What character of house is it?"

"Well, no one can tell; but there are some very suspicious-looking people that go in and out of that place."

"Men or women?"

"Both; and they are all a bad-looking lot."

Leaving the store, Verac muttered to himself:

"I thought so; and I'm going to get into that house, even with the chance against me of never coming out again!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

As Verac moved down toward the house numbered 400, it was evident that he anticipated a dangerous experiment.

Like a man familiar with the use of weapons, he clapped his hand under the flaps of his coat, and fastened his grasp upon the handle of a knife.

"That's all right for use!" he murmured, and moved his hand to his pistol-pocket. A second exclamation indicated that he had found that little article, so handy in certain cases of emergency, all right, too.

Having satisfied himself in regard to his weapons, this strange man moved down toward the house, keeping on the opposite side from it, when he saw a man come forth through the basement doorway.

The moment Verac's eyes fell upon this man, an expression came over his face that was almost demoniac, and a name fell from his lips in tones that boded no good to the owner of it.

Involuntarily, as it appeared, his hand flew back to his pistol-pocket, as though the emergency had suddenly arisen when that dangerous article could well come into play.

At the same instant, however, a second thought apparently flashed over his mind, and withdrawing his hand he moved rapidly forward, and did not pay any more attention to the man or the house from whence the latter had come, until at a safe distance, when, as before, Verac turned about and watched through the agency of a double corner window.

Fortunately, the man who had come from the house passed in an opposite direction from that taken by Verac, and did not appear to have noticed the latter's presence at all.

Little did the fellow know that at last he was under the darkest shadow of fate—that at last the dim star had made the last transit of his bright one, and that at last the horoscopic firm

ment was to have one of its lights "doused" forever.

The man turned the corner, and soon disappeared from sight, and yet there stood Verac, as patient and immovable as a statue.

He could wait, now—wait as the tiger watches for its prey; and if a human face can truly present a tigerish expression, such a one rested upon Verac's countenance at this moment.

A quarter of an hour passed, when the watcher happened to glance down the street and saw the same men approaching.

"That's what it means!" muttered Verac, as he turned and walked slowly away. "That devil has been around the corner to see if the road is clear."

After a moment he added:

"He must not see me yet, but we shall meet! I have waited long, and now, after many years, I may wrest the secret from his throat!"

The man stopped at the corner a moment, and then sauntered leisurely toward the house from whence he had come.

The shadows of night now began to lengthen, and Verac met the lamp-lighter going his rounds while returning to the corner from whence he could watch the house.

Upon gaining his old position, he found that he had not been a moment too quick.

The man had entered the house, and having evidently reported the road as clear, the woman, Mrs. Vance, had come out, and was just leaving the stoop as Verac came and saw her.

It was now a better time to dodge, and a still better time to "pipe."

Night was a favorable time for the game of hide-and-seek in a great city.

Mrs. Vance evidently felt that all danger of being dogged was not past, as her movements were exceedingly cautious and wary.

Verac had found an opportunity, favored by the darkness, while in a dark street, to again make a change in his personal appearance, and it was done as effectually and as rapidly as a protean artist, who has but a second to change in the side scenes.

Mrs. Vance had walked well up town on the east side, and her follower wondered that she had not taken some kind of a vehicle, as, counting her many turnings and windings, she had covered a great deal of ground.

At last she took a course directly across town, and made no more deviations from her course until she reached the Hudson River Railroad Depot, at that time located in Thirtieth Street.

"By all the gods!" muttered her follower, upon seeing her enter the depot, "I believe that I am in luck. It's millions to millions she intends to slope, and has got the heavy swag with her!"

Relying upon his disguise, as before, Verac entered the depot at the very moment the woman was making inquiries about a train that stopped at a certain station about twenty miles from the city.

The train left at nine-twenty, and Mrs. Vance bought her ticket.

When she turned away from the ticket-office there was no one in the station, and she heaved a heavy sigh and seated herself to await the departure of the train.

Thus the moments passed, until the depot-master opened the door, and as usual called the several stations at which the train would stop.

Mrs. Vance was among the first to go and secure a seat in the cars.

The moment she had passed out, a man walked by to the ticket-office and purchased a ticket for the same number that she had.

As the last passenger turned away from the little hole Verac entered and advanced toward it, and for an instant the two men stood face to face.

It was but a casual glance that the first man cast upon the last comer, when he went out and took his seat in the cars.

Verac looked after him a moment, while a strange smile played over his features, when he, too, at last bought his ticket and passed out on the platform, and walked along beside the train.

All of our readers are acquainted with the usual scenes attending the departure of a railroad train, and upon this night they were about the same as are to be witnessed about a railroad station.

There were the usual hand-shakings, the hurried adieus, a few hasty kisses, the ringing of a bell, and soon the long train began to move.

Verac did not get aboard until the train was in motion, when at the last moment he leaped on the last car.

"Now," he muttered, as the train thundered

on its way, "I can kill two birds with one stone; to-night may prove the most eventful of my whole life."

And the train thundered on its way.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Mrs. VANCE and Victor Gasquoine, as our readers have already divined, were confederates.

As it appeared, there was at the time that Sleuth interviewed the supposed heir, an open rupture between them.

As much is learned of the acts and motives of bad people through their guilty conversations, we judge it the most direct and brief mode of explaining certain dark points in our narrative, by relating the words that passed between the two schemers, during an interview which followed Gasquoine's confidential consultation with his friend, the French assassin, Verac.

During the consultation between the two latter, Gasquoine had offered a large sum of money to Verac, to induce him to murder, or have murdered, three persons.

The three individuals thus appointed to death by the villain Gasquoine were—in the first place, Old Sleuth, the detective; in the second place, the mysterious concealed person, the so-called Frances Gasquoine, in case her whereabouts could be discovered.

The third party doomed to death, or rather whose death was being deliberately contracted for, was Mrs. Vance.

The blood-thirsty villain who sought the lives of the three persons above mentioned, actually offered a higher price and laid more store upon the death of the late housekeeper than of the other two.

Immediately after the departure of the assassin Verac, Mrs. Vance had a second time entered the room, and had confronted Gasquoine with the charge that he was bargaining for her destruction.

In answer to this allegation Gasquoine said, coolly:

"There is one thing certain, Mrs. Vance, you must surrender what you have in your possession, or it is just possible that some day your name may appear in the death record."

"Had I been as smart as I thought I was, Victor Gasquoine, I would have known that a man who would procure the murder of his own flesh and blood would also, in the end, bargain for the murder of his accomplice."

"You are talking at random, madam, and making charges that could only emanate from the brain of a crazy woman."

"Well, there is one thing I want you to understand, Victor Gasquoine, that being forewarned I am forearmed; and I would rather die and carry my secret with me, than surrender it to you without the fulfillment of your contract to the letter."

"There are two alternatives presented, madam; you must surrender or die! or I must secure those papers or die! I suppose I might as well say."

"Those papers will be produced when your compact is fulfilled!"

"You shall have twice the sum of money I have heretofore offered you."

"The whole estate will not satisfy me."

"And do you really think that you can force me to make you my wife?"

"You must fulfill your contract or be thrown from your present high position! As your wife it would be to my interest to hide my secrets; as your enemy it would be my first purpose to betray them."

"We can compromise in some other way; there is no necessity for you to write yourself down my enemy."

"You are dealing with a woman that has got nothing further to learn in her game with you! My patience is exhausted; so you see I do not fear you so greatly, as I am adding to your motive to murder me!"

"And you may provoke me to do it!"

"Either way I am satisfied, Victor Gasquoine!" exclaimed the woman, her eyes burning with a lurid light and her voice hoarse with passion. "Yes, yes," she added, with a hiss, "in life I am your master, and my death would be the blow that would crush you—crush you—ay, grind you to powder!"

Victor Gasquoine recoiled in the presence of the aroused woman. A contingency had arisen that he had not bargained for.

His intended victim had cunningly made preparations for death, and provided for her revenge from the grave.

The full truth of what a safeguard she had thrown around her life presented itself forcibly to his mind.

At first he had been surprised at her so boldly adding to the motive for killing her, but now he saw that this boldness was only the groundwork of a bulwark that was to protect her life.

In fact, her life had suddenly become as precious to him as it could in some sense be to her.

The scoundrel ground his teeth in baffled hate and rage.

"Then you intend to defy me?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I intend to defy you!"

"And betray me also, I suppose?"

"That depends on whether you seek to betray me or not."

"There is no betrayal about it in my case; you hold papers that belong to me; I wish you to surrender them, and I will pay you for so doing."

"I have no papers that belong to you."

"You have!"

"I have not. The papers in my possession we both schemed to obtain. They are as much mine as yours, and you know it!"

Victor Gasquoine's face became livid; his features were contorted by the excess of his rage, and a dangerous fury glowed in his eyes, as he exclaimed:

"Once for all, will you treat on a fair basis?"

"I will only treat on the basis of a fulfillment of your compact."

"Then, you she-devil," ejaculated Gasquoine, completely beside himself with rage, "let the consequences be upon your own head!"

As the maddened villain uttered the above exclamation, he sprung to his feet, and rushing toward Mrs. Vance, raised his hand and struck her a powerful blow that felled her to the floor.

The woman struggled to gain her feet; at the same time she attempted to scream, but a second blow knocked her back insensible.

Having gratified the wild, vengeful passions of the instant, the exasperated man cooled down sufficiently to realize what he had done.

He remembered his victim's words:

"My death will make your destruction sure!"

Instantly he set about restoring her to consciousness.

Finally he succeeded, when he said, soothingly:

"You must forgive me! I struck you in a moment of uncontrollable passion, and I shall regret my act the remainder of my life!"

Mrs. Vance replied, in a peculiar tone of voice:

"Yes, Victor Gasquoine, you will regret that blow the remainder of your life, surely!"

She turned to leave the room.

The man who had struck her bid her stay one moment.

She refused, and ten minutes later she left the house.

She was in the street before Gasquoine fully realized her intentions; then he followed her, and was thrown off the track, as recorded, while the more wily Verac hung upon her trial, and tracked her to the depot and upon the train, as described.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was near midnight when the train upon which Mrs. Vance had taken passage came to a halt at the station for which she had bought a ticket.

Taking the small satchel in her hand, she left her seat, came out upon the platform, and alighted.

It was a gloomy prospect presented as she stepped from the train down upon the station platform.

The night had clouded over, a steady rain had set in, and occasional fitful blasts of wind made the adjacent sign-boards rattle.

The woman shuddered, as she drew her veil down over her face while passing the station reflector.

"Mercy! what a terrible night for a two-mile walk along a lonely road!" she muttered, audibly; "But it matters not—I must go. Those papers must be removed."

As the woman gave utterance to this exclamation, a dark figure was standing within the station door, and not more than four feet distant.

A moment passed, and then the train, with a shrill whistle, proceeded on its way.

The station-master advanced toward the late traveler, as the train moved off, and said:

"If you have far to go, madam, I can pre-

take a wagon for you. It's a rough night for one to get along."

"Thank you," replied the woman, drawing back as if she feared him, "but I have not far to go."

At this moment the wind actually howled, and the rain beat along the platform furiously.

"I will have to close the station, madam," again spoke the station-master, in an apologetic tone.

"Do not regard me at all, sir. I shall go home as soon as the fury of this gust of wind subsides."

"There are no more trains to-night, or you could remain in the sitting-room."

"Do not regard me at all," repeated the woman, in quite a sharp and peremptory tone.

"All right, ma'am," said the man, in a slightly offended manner, and he proceeded to lock up.

His duties were speedily completed, and all lights were extinguished save the outside reflector and a dim light in the telegraph operator's little office.

Ten minutes passed.

The wind at length subsided somewhat, and the woman stepped off and made her way over the wet ground, with the rain beating steadily down upon her.

She had proceeded but a short distance when a dark figure stole around from the opposite side of the station-house, and moved swiftly and stealthily after her.

This second figure had just disappeared in the darkness, when a third suspiciously acting person moved away in the same direction.

Mrs. Vance passed along through the sparsely settled village, as though she were familiar with every step of the way.

Soon she came to a narrow path which led up the side of a hill.

It was a wild, barren place, where wild bushes and a profuse undergrowth flourished in unkempt confusion.

Arriving at the foot of this path, she commenced to ascend, and after much difficulty reached to the top of the hill.

It was a dreary scene presented, and as the wind came howling past her, for a moment she recoiled, muttering:

"I wonder if it would be safe for me to wait until daylight?"

"No, no," she added, after a moment. "I have escaped being followed this far, and I must proceed; I know not but that by to-morrow Victor may suspect my destination and come after me."

Holding her satchel in one hand, and pressing her bonnet upon her head with the other, she commenced to pick her way through the tangle and dripping bushes.

A few minutes' walk brought her under the shadow of a patch of woods.

The latter broke the force of the wind, and permitted her to proceed with less trouble.

When well into the woods, and while proceeding rapidly along a well-beaten and clearly defined pathway, she chanced to look up, when, right in the path ahead of her, she beheld a white object.

A faint scream fell from her lips, as she started a step or two and gazed forward with dilated eyes.

The object moved. It came toward her.

The woman's hair stood on end, and yet she was rooted to the spot.

She sought to move away, but could not.

To scream she knew would be useless.

Nearer came the white figure, and when about fifteen feet distant, the object's outlines were plainly visible.

It was the form of a woman.

When at about the distance above mentioned, the woman in white came to a halt, and there, beneath the dark shadow of the trees, with the rain dripping down upon them from the leaves, stood the two women.

Mrs. Vance felt that the hour of retribution had come.

She was a superstitious creature at best.

She was also a guilty woman, and during the last few months her nerves had been fearfully tried.

There was not the least doubt in her mind but that the figure standing in the path was a supernatural visitation.

Trembling she stood, expecting each moment to hear a sepulchral voice address her, when suddenly she was startled by hearing a deromonic laugh, and the white figure vanished.

"It was some moments before Mrs. Vance mas-

tered sufficient courage to advance, but at length murmuring:

"I must do it! I must proceed, and finish it to-night," she walked forward.

No other interruption occurred, and she succeeded in passing through the woods, and finally emerged upon an open space.

In the center of the latter, and but dimly visible in the gloom, stood an old tumble-down house.

"Thanks!" muttered the woman. "I have reached here at last. Now to secure the papers, and my work is done for the night, and then, Victor Gasquoine, we will see whether or not you will fulfill your compact."

She approached the old house.

Not a sign of a living thing was observable.

All was still, dreary, and desolate.

It was a one-story-and-attic farm-house.

Half-way built up with rough stones, everything about it was indicative of desolation and decay.

A tumble-down gate admitted her into the front garden, and traversing the grass-covered path, she gained the rickety porch.

An easy push sent the door creaking on its hinges, and she passed into the damp, dark apartment.

From her reticule she took a candle and matches, and speedily succeeded in striking a light, and the flickering flame cast a gleam upon the mold and slime that covered everything in the miserable old house.

A moment later the woman passed into a second apartment, and at the same moment, a dark figure stole up the garden-path toward the door,

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE wind howled about the old house, and whirled and whizzed through the shutterless windows, as Mrs. Vance passed from the first room to a second, from whence a pair of rickety stairs led up into the attic.

Her face was pale, and her limbs trembled under her, and there rested a resolute expression upon her ghastly features, mingled with a smile of triumph.

As she started to ascend the stairs, a gust of wind blew out her light, and she crawled forward in the darkness, muttering, as she went:

"Those papers once in my possession, I am Victor Gasquoine's master."

Thus alternately muttering and halting, she finally reached the head of the stairs, and opening a door and lighting her candle, again found herself in a large attic or garret.

The accumulated cobwebs of years depended from the rafters, and hung in festoons almost to the floor.

It was a desolate place, and none but a woman of wonderful nerve, or one inspired by some terrible purpose, would have dared remain there even in the day-time let alone such an hour in the night, and upon a night when the elements appeared to be at war.

Mrs. Vance did not possess much nerve, but she was animated by a great purpose, even though it was a sinister one, and this latter alone sustained her in her performances.

She stood for a moment motionless, after having relighted her candle, but after an interval she moved across the attic toward the chimney-place, muttering as she went:

"Oh! would that I could call upon Heaven to help me now, but I can not—I dare not!"

She reached the chimney-place, and with a face as ghastly as that of a specter, she thrust her hand behind the chimney, after the removal of one or two bricks, and drew forth a tin box, about eight inches square.

As she drew forth the box, her eyes dilated, and her features were actually contorted with varied emotions as she exclaimed, in a hoarse voice:

"Ah, ha! I have got it at last."

At this moment a dark form darted across the room, and an arm passed before the woman, the tin box was wrested suddenly from her grasp, and a husky voice whispered:

"No! it is mine."

Mrs. Vance turned with a scream frozen upon her lips, and her eyes rested upon the dark face of a man.

With a wild energy the woman clutched at the box to recover it, but a strong hand grasped her arm, and shoved her back, while a fierce, threatening voice ejaculated fiercely:

"No! not this is mine."

"No; but it is mine," came the words, repeated by a third voice, and the box was wrested from the first man's grasp.

The latter turned and beheld a pistol aimed at his heart, while by the fitful light he recognized a tall form towering over him, and a fierce pair of eyes gleaming at him.

"Who the devil are you, and where did you come from?" exclaimed the man from whom the box had just been wrested.

"You ought to know who I am, Alteo, without being told."

Alteo recoiled back a step, and with the quickness of thought dashed the candle from Mrs. Vance's hand, and at the same time he exclaimed:

"Ah! ha! I know you, and now, Mr. Lightning Detective, our accounts will be settled for ever."

The extinguishment of the candle had left the party in total darkness, and as Alteo spoke the place was illuminated by a flash, followed by a report and a scream.

The flash and report came from a pistol in the hands of Alteo; the scream issued from the lips of Mrs. Vance, as she fell prostrate to the floor in a wild paroxysm of terror.

Not a sound for some moments followed Alteo's shot—not a groan, or cry of distress.

A second report followed, and still there came no response, but after a moment a female voice called:

"Oh! cease this. For Heaven's sake commit no murder!"

An interval of silence followed.

At length Alteo cautiously commenced to grope around.

Suddenly the latter felt a strong grasp upon his throat, and in an instant his pistol was wrenched from his grasp, and he was borne to the earth, and a husky voice said:

"At last, devil, I have got you!"

"Yes; I have been expecting to meet you, Barrett Griffin," came the reply, in a hoarse voice.

"Well, we have met at last!" answered the Lightning Detective, who had been acting under the assumed name of Verac, and he added: "Now, scoundrel you have but one chance for your life!"

"I have taken all the chances, and the game has gone against me!" was the husky reply.

The Lightning Detective held the villain Alteo, alias Blacklin, prone upon his back, and pressed his knee upon the rascal's chest, thus holding him powerless for mischief.

The detective had released his hold upon Alteo's throat, so as to permit the man to speak.

"Where is my child, devil?" asked the Lightning Detective, after a moment's silence.

"Where you will never find her!" was the defiant reply.

"Speak, villain! does she yet live?"

"Yes."

"Then, if you would prolong your own life, confess what you have done with her."

"It would be too harassing a story for a father's ear!" was the cruel reply.

"Fiend! you have escaped me so often," hissed the detective, "that you think you may again, and are still defiant."

"My hopes of life have narrowed down to a fine point," was the dogged answer.

"Save your life then, by an honest confession."

"Never! I would rather die knowing that I had been revenged upon you, Barrett Griffin, than live and know that I had caused you one moment's happiness?"

"Die you surely will, unless you tell me where my child is hidden."

"Go ahead! I have not asked for mercy."

"Nor have you asked how you must die?" said the detective, in a significant tone.

"I don't care."

"I'll roast you alive, as sure as your name is Alteo."

"You are the executioner; work your own vengeance!"

"Have you no heart?"

"If I ever had, I lost it long ago."

"Then, scoundrel, your death be upon your own head!" exclaimed the detective, fiercely; but the next instant he received a blow upon the side of his head that knocked him over upon the dusty floor of the attic.

"Now is your time, Blacklin! I've fixed him!" came a voice.

Blacklin sprung to his feet, when just at that moment the old garret was illuminated by a red glare of light, and a shriek issued from the lips of Mrs. Vance.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHEN Alteo had knocked the candle from the hand of Mrs. Vance, it had not been extinguished, but had fallen through a place where a portion of the flooring had decayed and fallen in, leaving a large aperture.

Hissing and sputtering, down it had fallen upon the floor of the apartment beneath, among a mass of debris, which it had ignited.

Thus, while the exciting scene above described was transpiring, the flames had gradually increased and spread until the whole lower apartment was in flames.

Not the least intimation did the struggling parties have of the accident until just at the moment when Mrs. Vance had struck the detective, when the flames burst through the floor at one end of the galler, and illuminated the place with their red glare.

It is a remarkable fact that many men who will bravely face one sort of danger will shrink like curs from another one.

It was so in this case.

Mrs. Vance's shriek called Alteo's attention to the state of affairs, when the latter, instead of seeking to murder the Lightning Detective, was stricken with terror, and only thought to escape from the flaming building.

So great was his sudden terror that he even forgot to take the box, which lay upon the floor beside the prostrate and stunned detective.

He made a rush toward the door opening upon the stairway.

Gazing down, he saw nothing but a seething, hissing mass of flames, which were rapidly licking their way upward.

With a yell he turned and moved toward one of the low attic windows.

As he did so, he saw the woman Mrs. Vance just in the act of reaching down to secure the box.

Despite his terror, he retained sufficient presence of mind, upon beholding this movement, to realize the importance of securing the casket, and at the same moment a terrible resolution animated him.

The woman already had the box in her hand. "Give that to me!" he exclaimed, reaching forth his hands to take the article.

"No! no! This is mine!" said the woman.

Alteo sought to wrest it from her grasp.

The woman struggled to retain it.

Curses burst from the man's lips.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "give me that box!"

"No! no! It is mine—mine!" was the frantic reply.

A desperate struggle followed, and all the time the flames were bursting out in fresh holes in the floor.

A moment more and the whole would go down with a crash.

Alteo's hand was thrust behind him, and withdrawn in an instant.

"Fool," he hissed, "there is no time to lose! Will you give up the box?"

The roar of the flames was now loud and fierce, almost drowning the woman's voice, as she frantically as before replied:

"No! no! It is mine! It is mine!"

The Lightning Detective revived in the midst of this quarrel, and springing forward he dashed Alteo to the floor, and at the same instant seized the casket. The black column of smoke concealed the form of the woman, and all three were threatened with a terrible death by the fire.

There was not a moment to spare.

Seizing the casket, the detective made his way to the window, and leaped out down upon the ground.

The next moment the flooring of the attic, which he had but just left, gave way, and went down with a crash into the seething mass of flames below, carrying with it the bodies of Mrs. Vance and the no less wicked and crime stained scoundrel, Alteo.

It was a difficultfeat for the detective to crawl through such a small window, but he managed to do it, and, as mentioned, just in time to prevent being cast down with the bodies of the woman and Alteo.

When he picked himself up, he found that the rain had ceased to fall, but the wind was blowing a perfect gale.

Drawing off to a distance, the detective stood and surveyed the terrible scene.

"Thank Heaven!" he murmured, as the roof of the old house fell in with a crash. "I have escaped with my life, and have secured the casket."

The officer was ignorant concerning the contents of the tin box, but knowing what the woman was supposed to hold in her possession, and her anxiety to secure the casket, he had but little doubt that its capture would fully pay him for all of his trouble.

He still stood and watched, until the house was completely gutted, and the fire had almost spent itself, when he began to consider about getting away.

He knew that it was a question as to whether any identifying remains of the two bodies would be found. Still, his quick reasoning convinced him that it would save much trouble if he covered his tracks, and concealed the fact of his connection with the tragedy.

He was still pondering as to what course he should take, when he heard the sound of voices and the approaching tramp of many feet.

He knew at once that the villagers had been aroused by the glare of the fire, and had come to see what had happened.

"They must not find me around here," muttered the detective, as he struck off into the woods in another direction from that from whence the crowd of villagers were approaching.

It was daylight when Barrett Griffin reached the suburbs of the city.

For prudential reasons he had footed the whole distance from the scene of the tragedy.

Late in the afternoon upon the following day, the four detectives met at a certain rendezvous, to compare notes, according to a previous agreement.

The Lightning Detective was the last to put in an appearance.

At length he came, bringing the tin box with him that he had captured at so much risk the night previously.

"Well, what luck?" asked Sleuth, as Griffin joined them.

"I have captured this!" was the answer, as the detective laid the mysterious box upon the table.

"What does it contain?" asked Fergus Connors.

"You must open it and see," was the answer. "I do not know."

Sleuth managed, after some trouble, to open the box, when all four detectives uttered exclamations of surprise and delight!

"All to do with it. We set out to ~~solve this~~ mystery, and we must do it before we cry 'pec-cavi.'

"Who is the rightful heir?"

"Miss Frances Gasquoine, the old man's legitimate daughter."

"But she is dead," said the gypsy.

"What makes you think that she is dead?"

"I have worked up the matter, and putting all the points together, I am satisfied that the girl's remains lie moldering in the cavern beneath that house by the river."

"You are out once, Phil," said Sleuth.

"Again to you, how do you know that I am out?"

"Because I have seen the girl in life."

"When and where?"

Sleuth told of his meeting with the woman in white at the time old Gasquoine's body lay ready for burial.

"Then we must find both the girl and the will."

"That is the work we have before us, and we will close in on the last scene, by having Victor Gasquoine and that woman Vance hung!"

"You will never hang that woman," said the Lightning Detective.

"Sing out your tenor!" said the Irish Detective. "Have you let her gently over a precipice somewhere?"

The Lightning Detective told his story.

We may here mention that the Lightning Detective had all along been at work shadowing both the woman Vance and Gasquoine.

To favor his ends he had availed himself of his lingual accomplishments to join a French society of which Gasquoine was a member, and he was the man in the slouched hat who had headed the search for Sleuth, upon the same night when the latter met with the woman in white.

Our readers will recollect that Sleuth was in the front room upon that eventful night when the tall man went in, with dagger and pistol drawn, to find him.

Our readers now know why he came forth and reported to Gasquoine that there was no one in the room.

It was for the purpose of allowing Sleuth to escape that the tall man pretended to quarrel with Gasquoine, so as to gain time.

We will here state another fact, also.

Namely, that the Lightning Detective came very near paying the forfeit of his life upon that occasion, as in the darkness Sleuth did not recognize him, and would have dispatched him, had not the latter signaled just in time.

After these various explanations, as recorded, the four detectives held a long consultation as to what their next course of action should be.

It was finally determined that all of their energies should be bent to the discovery of the girl Frances, and the finding of the missing will.

The Lightning Detective was asked, and consented to remain and assist them, although stating that he felt that his first duty was to continue his search for his long-lost child.

The Irish and Gypsy Detectives had not seen fit to tell Barrett Griffin concerning the girl that they had seen in the forger's den by the river.

Their reason for this concealment was a simple one.

Both were on a "lay" that made them sanguine of recovering the girl, and they wished to reserve their success as a pleasant surprise for the long-anxious father.

These shrewd men were still talking the matter over, while the mysterious tin box from which the bonds had been taken lay upon the table in the center of the room.

The window of the apartment was open, and quite a fresh draught of air was blowing through it, when suddenly a stronger gust than usual lifted a small slip of paper from the table, and carried it fluttering across the room.

Old Sleuth saw it, and, rising from his chair, he secured it, when instantly, upon glancing at it, a complete change came over his countenance.

A few meaningless words, apparently, were written upon it; but, to the eye of the detective, they carried a meaning that caused his face to literally beam with delight.

He put the valuable little slip in his vest pocket, and said nothing; shortly afterward the four solvers of mysteries separated.

The gypsy, during the time that the events above recorded were transpiring, had availed himself of several opportunities to visit his friends by the river.

A singular change had come over the de-

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE Lightning Detective had not opened the box previously, and he was as much surprised and delighted as his companions when Sleuth drew forth a number of papers, and exclaimed, cheerfully:

"Boys, our fortune is made!"

"How's that, old man?" asked the others, in chorus.

"Here are the missing bonds!" said the old war-horse of the detectives.

Subsequent more careful examination demonstrated the fact that they were all there, and that the recovery had been perfect and complete.

After exchanging congratulations, Sleuth said:

"There is one paper I hoped to find when I opened this box, which, I am sorry to say, is not here."

"And what paper is that?" asked the Irish Detective.

"One more important than these bonds."

"That's a Yankee answer," said Connors, with his characteristic humorous smile, and playful nod.

"Well, I expected to find the will."

"Whose will?"

"Old Mr. Gasquoine's will."

"We have got the bonds, and earned our reward, haven't we?"

"Yes; but unless the will is found, these bonds will go to enrich the worst scoundrel and most blood-thirsty assassin in New York."

"And what's his name?" asked Connors.

"Victor Gasquoine."

"But if we found the will, what better would it be?"

"Then the money and estate would go to the rightful owner."

"And what have we to do with that part of it?"

manor of this usually careless and nonchalant man.

Heretofore he had been careless and indifferent about his dress, but his few friends had observed that he had become exceedingly scrupulous on this subject, especially when visiting the residence where he had found so safe an asylum for the strange girl whose life he had saved.

Another fact had become patent to Mrs. Urquhardt—she had discovered that the man who had been so servile to her own family had suddenly become solicitous concerning the comfort of her beautiful charge.

Matters stood in this shape when, two days subsequent to the discovery of the bonds, the Gypsy Detective received a dispatch which caused him to forsake all immediate occupations and hasten to the home of his friends.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

The dispatch received by the Gypsy Detective was in the form of a letter from his old friend, Mrs. Gertie Urquhardt, and ran as follows:

"DEAR FRIEND.—There is a strange man lurking around our premises, and I am constrained to think that he is watching the movements of Miss Mermier.

"Although his dress is that of a gentleman, I can not rid myself of the impression that he bears a villainous face, and that his motives are sinister.

"The man must have dogged Miss Mermier in such a manner as to have avoided attracting her attention, as she has made no allusion to the singular fact, and yet upon several occasions I have seen him tracking her; and, without giving any reasons, I have skillfully managed to keep her from going off the grounds surrounding the mansion.

"I have a presentiment that this fellow means some kind of mischief, and your coming and investigating the matter would result in allaying my alarm, even if it does not avert a more serious calamity,

"Yours,
"MRS. URQUHARDT."

Upon receiving the above letter, the Gypsy Detective attached even more importance to the presence of the stranger than Mrs. Urquhardt had expressed.

Our hero still indulged a lurking suspicion that there was some dark mystery that enveloped the life of the lovely girl who had aroused an interest in his bosom such as he had never experienced before.

It was late in the afternoon when he received his letter, and it was night when a handsomely dressed woman stepped off the train at the nearest station to the Urquhardt mansion.

As this female passenger stepped into the waiting-room, the light revealed the fact that her features were small and regular, and that she was a brunette, with piercing black eyes and white, pearly teeth.

Another passenger also alighted at the same station.

The latter was an oldish gentleman, rather portly, and also the possessor of a pair of keen, piercing black eyes.

The lady passenger only remained in the waiting-room until the train moved away, when she came forth and pursued her way by the street leading to the village center.

The other passenger lingered for some time after the departure of the train, employing his time in making inquiries of the usual number of loafers to be found loafing around railroad stations.

The absorbing topic of conversation was still a discussion of the mysterious burning of an old farm-house situated about two miles from town, and the supposed finding of charred human remains.

The stranger appeared to take great interest in this discussion, and made many inquiries, and offered numerous suggestions and theories.

He now particularly inquired as to whether any strangers had been seen loitering around the village previous to the conflagration, and it was fully half an hour before he left the station and took the leading road to the village.

In the meantime, the dark-faced woman whom we described as having alighted from the train had passed through the main street of the town, and had subsequently pursued a well-graded road that led up to a number of hand-

some residences that lined the ridge or high ground back of the village, and about a quarter of a mile distant from the village limits.

While passing through the village, this female had conducted herself in an ordinary and proper manner, but when once beyond the precincts of the town, her whole manner changed.

Rapidly she passed along until she arrived in front of a stately mansion, before which stretched, away down to the fence lining the road, a magnificent lawn.

Upon the piazza of this house, and distinctly visible under the bright moonlight, was assembled a party of ladies and gentlemen.

The woman who had come from the village did not come to a halt upon arriving opposite the house, but only slackened her pace, and while moving slowly forward, her basilisk-like gaze was fastened with a tigerish expression upon a lovely young lady who sat at the extreme end of the porch, conversing with a gentleman.

"There she is!" muttered the dark-faced woman, between her grating teeth, adding after a moment:

"I have made my inquiries, and it is well that I did; the owner of this mansion is a lawyer, Mr. Urquhardt, and it is he whom that woman is talking with, and probably he is the counsel engaged to turn me adrift upon the world penniless, once more. But we shall see! Ha! ha! ha! yes, Miss Mermier, we shall see!" repeated the dark-faced woman, laughing still more vindictively.

Passing along until she was some distance beyond the house the woman who had given utterance to the above strange exclamation came to a halt under the shadow of a tree, and drew

The position chosen by this muttering assassin was one from whence she could watch the movements of those upon the piazza of the mansion.

Presently she saw the gentleman walk away from the young lady who was stationed at the further end of the porch, when the latter rose from her seat and stepping down upon the lawn, approached a summer-house standing upon an artificial knoll some distance from the house.

Upon seeing this movement upon the part of the young lady, the woman who lay concealed a second time uttered a low demoniac laugh, and scaling the pickets, crawled like a snake toward the same summer-house that the young lady was approaching.

The latter had almost reached the vine-covered bower, when her steps were arrested by a voice from the piazza.

"Emily," called a richly dressed lady, "do not wander off there alone, dear."

The young lady turned a moment, and answered back:

"There is no danger such a night as this," and she resumed her walk toward the summer-house, behind which lurked the watcher.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BEFORE seeing the girl resume her walk toward the arbor, the woman crawling through the grass muttered:

"No, there is no danger—come on! But if you ever return, it will not be my fault!"

How often has that same response been made to the voice of warning. "There is no danger," when, at the very moment, the speaker has been upon the very brink of destruction!

Thus it was in the case above recorded.

The words of warning came floating over the lawn, "It is dangerous," and the same breeze wafted back the answer, "All is right," when death was lurking twenty feet away.

The young lady who was thus unconsciously approaching her fate appeared lost in a dreamy reverie.

Reaching the bower, she entered, and seating herself upon a rustic seat, gave utterance to her musings.

"I must leave this pleasant home," she muttered, "and these pleasant people, and go out upon the world and fight the battle of life."

After a moment's silence, she resumed, and said:

"I feel already as though I were suspected as an impostor."

And again, after another interval of silence she said:

"I am watched and kept under a surveillance that is annoying. They may mean kindly, but I must go; and yet it is hard for me, who live a lonely and friendless life, to be forced to fly from the only pleasant home I ever lived in."

At this moment a figure darkened the doorway.

The young lady rose to her feet, and was about to utter a scream, when a voice said:

"Do not scream—I am a friend," and, at the same time, it was revealed that the new-comer was a handsomely dressed female.

"Who are you?" asked Miss Mermier.

"I am one who has been hunting the world over to find you!" was the reply, in French.

"From whence have you come?"

"From France."

"And who are you, and why have you sought for me?"

"I have much to tell you."

"Concerning what?"

"Your birth and parentage, and your future."

"Were you a friend of my adopted father?"

"I was a friend of your real father."

Instantly the young lady clasped her hands, and exclaimed, in an appealing tone:

"Oh, speak quickly, and tell me of my father!"

"Will you come and walk with me? We might be interrupted here."

Emily Mermier hesitated.

She had been so often deceived, that instantly a weird suspicion flashed over her mind.

At length she replied:

"Can you not make your communication here? We are not liable to interruption, and you must remember that it is night, and that you are a stranger to me."

"Have you learned already to distrust strangers?" asked the woman, in an insinuating tone of voice.

"Frankly speaking, I have," was the reply.

"You certainly have no reason to fear me; I am but a woman, and a stranger. What possible motive could I have for harming you?"

There was something so plaintively reproachful and magnetic in the tones of the stranger's voice, that Miss Mermier really began to feel ashamed of her expressed suspicion, and she said, apologetically:

"It is not that I suspect you, but I have been often deceived, and besides, I do not see why you can not speak here."

"I will tell you why I can not speak here—I have reason to know that your enemies and mine are upon my track."

"Have my enemies discovered my retreat?" asked Emily, excitedly.

"No; but they suspected that I was in communication with you, and have been dogging me for days in the hope of finding you."

"It is strange that you should know so much of my history. I pray you once more answer me—who are you?"

"It is sufficient for the present that I am a relative who would see you secure the rights of which you have long been deprived."

"Oh, let me see your face! Can I—oh, can I trust you?"

"What object could I possibly have in deceiving you?"

"I know not, and yet I feel a strange presentiment of the near approach of some terrible calamity."

"That is because I told you a moment ago that your enemies were upon your track."

"Then I must fly!"

"Yes; and you must fly with me."

"Not to-night?"

"Yes, to-night."

"I can not."

"You can at least go with me and hear what communication I have to make."

"Can you not communicate your intelligence in the presence of a third party?"

"I can not; and now, listen. I am the child of your father's brother. I speak truly as, Heaven is above—I swear by this emblem, that your reverence! Then come, lest at this moment our enemies may be approaching!"

"Where would you have me go?"

"Not far: there is a cottage beyond here a short distance where we can talk without the fear of interruption."

"I will trust you; but remember, if you deceive me, Heaven will punish you as you deserve."

"Well, come!"

"How far are we to go?"

"Not far."

"I must get my sacque and hood."

"You do not need them, nor must you be seen with me. I will hasten to the hedge across the lawn, and there await your coming."

"I will come."

"Truly?"

"Yes."

"Do not fail!" exclaimed the woman, and she silently glided from the bower and moved across the lawn toward the line of hedge that she had indicated.

After the departure of the strange woman, Miss Mermier stood a moment and considered.

"Suppose," she murmured, after a moment, "that this is only another device to betray me into the hands of my deadliest foe?"

For some time longer she stood and pondered.

At length, seemingly resolved to dare the attempt, she moved from the bower, and was proceeding toward the hedge, when a hand was laid upon her shoulder, and a voice asked:

"Where are you going?"

"Do not ask me," was the piteous reply. "I am going probably toward my fate!"

"Was there some one talking to you in the bower a moment ago?"

"Yes, Mrs. Urquhardt."

"A person that you were acquainted with?"

"No, madam; it was a stranger."

"A man or a woman?"

"A woman."

"And you had never seen her before?"

"No."

"Are you not afraid to go and meet a stranger at this hour in the evening?"

"I am; but the stranger has made promises to me which, if redeemed, may result in my future happiness."

"I would urge you, Emily, under ordinary circumstances, not to heed this strange woman's words; her manner of approaching you is suspicious. Still, for reasons I will explain at some future time, I will consent that you should go."

And Emily moved away toward the hedge.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"You have been talking to some one since I left you," exclaimed the strange woman, in a sharp tone, as Emily joined her.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Who was it?"

"Mrs. Urquhardt, the young mistress of the mansion over there."

"And what did she say to you?"

"Excuse me," replied Emily, "if I inquire by what right you ask me that question?"

"Have I not said that I was your relative, and that an enemy was upon your track?"

"But Mrs. Urquhardt is not my enemy."

"It matters little," said the stranger, abruptly; "come"—and she seized Emily by the arm and led her along a path that led directly toward a clump of woods about a quarter of a mile distant.

Miss Mermier felt many misgivings while following her conductress; and yet, when she came to think, it appeared impossible that any one could mean harm and proceed so boldly.

Arrived in the strip of wood, the dark-faced woman proceeded along until she reached a spot where the foliage was so dense that even the rays of the moon failed to penetrate.

It was certainly a dark, lonely place, well suited for the perpetration of a dark deed.

It was a hollow, through the center of which ran a muddy stream, bounded on one side by a shaggy wall of rock.

Beside the stream the strange woman came to a halt, and addressing her companion, said:

"I wish to warn you, miss, if anything startling occurs, and you utter one scream, the cry will cost you your life!"

Instantly Emily knew that she was in peril.

The woman's voice and manner had undergone a complete change.

Still, the young girl had encountered peril before, and did not lose her wonted nerve and coolness for an instant, and she replied, in a firm voice:

"Then you are an enemy!"

"I said that I was a relative."

"Then why have your manner and tone become so threatening?"

"You must not mind my manner or tone, but listen to the meaning of my words."

"Let me hear what you have to say; but be brief, as I do not fancy remaining in this lonely place, even to hear a communication as important as the one you have promised."

"Do you love life?" came the strange, abrupt question.

"I do not fear death," was the reply, boldly spoken.

"Well, let there be no further masquerading. I said that I was your relative, and I am—you and I are cousins."

"Who are you?" exclaimed Emily, as a terrible suspicion flashed over her mind.

"I am Victor Gasquoine!"

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Emily, and she started to run away, but a firm grasp was fastened upon her arm, and a stern voice exclaimed:

"Remember the warning I gave you! An attempt to escape, or a cry for help, will cost you your life!"

"Why have you inveigled me here?"

"To tell you the secret of your life."

"And then murder me?"

"No; not unless you force me to do so."

"Can I believe anything that you would tell me?"

"My communication will bear the evidence of its truth upon its face. Answer, did you ever suspect who you really were?"

"Never."

"And you always believed yourself to be my uncle's adopted daughter?"

"I always did."

"Then you were mistaken."

"Was I really related to him?"

"You were."

"What relationship did I bear to him?"

"You were his only daughter."

"Oh, mercy! Do you speak truly?"

"I do."

"Then why should my father conceal this fact from me?"

"Because he hated your mother."

"And why did he hate my mother?"

"He believed that she was false to him."

"And was she?"

"No; a purer woman never lived. And yet, although he long considered you his child, he thought that legally you were the offspring of crime."

"Did he ever discover his mistake?"

"He did."

"Thank Heaven for that."

"You might have thanked Heaven if he discovered it sooner."

"But of my mother—is she living?"

"No; your mother died many years ago—died of a broken heart."

"Then you and I are really cousins?"

"We are."

"The discovery of our relationship has removed your hatred toward me, I trust."

"I never hated you."

"Answer me one question, Victor Gasquoine!" exclaimed Emily, after a moment's silence. "Why have you come to me in this guise?"

"Because I had a purpose to serve."

"Am I concerned in your purpose?"

"You are."

"In what manner?"

"Your father supposed you dead when he made his will."

"Well?"

"Acting under this belief, he made me his sole heir."

"Well?" again said Emily, shortly.

"I do not propose to surrender up this property since I have learned the fact that you are living."

"But you propose at least to surrender a fair proportion, do you not?"

"Frances Gasquoine!" exclaimed Victor, advancing toward her, "you stand in my way!"

There was something sinister and threatening in the tones of her companion's voice, that caused Frances to start back in alarm. At the same moment she exclaimed:

"I do not wish to stand in your way, if you will but let me live in peace."

"You are a deceitful woman. Already you have placed your curse in the hands of men who are seeking to rob me!"

"It is false! No one knows who I am, and I have not a friend or partisan on earth."

"You are used to deceit. Now, then, listen to me. Will you become my wife?"

"This is an abrupt proposal."

"It is a just one. By marrying me, all ceases between us, and the two rightful heirs will hold your father's property."

"You must give me time to think."

"Take it. I am willing to wait."

"Come here in three days."

"No; you misunderstand me. I can not wait days—not even hours. Your decision must be given in a few minutes."

"But I can not decide upon such an important subject in a few moments."

"Nor can I permit you to leave this spot, after the revelations that I have made, until you have decided."

"How can you prevent me from leaving?"

"By force!"

"And would you resort to force?"

"I would."

"And must I answer you now?"

"Yes."

"Then hear me, Victor Gasquoine—I would rather die than marry a wretch like you!"

"Then die you shall!" fiercely exclaimed Gasquoine, as, with the stealthy bound of a cat, he sprung toward the defenseless girl.

CHAPTER XL.

"One moment, scoundrel!" came a voice, and the next instant Victor Gasquoine went tumbling in the brook, knocked there by a terrible blow dealt by the seeming old man who had been so inquisitive at the depot.

Despite her usual nerve, the suddenness of the attack and quickness of the rescue caused Miss Mermier to lose consciousness and fall fainting upon the dark grass.

The disguised villain, Gasquoine, was not hurt by the blow that he had received, and in a moment he was upon his feet, and with a volley of curses, sprang at the man who had felled him.

All signs of age suddenly vanished from the seeming old man, while, despite the female clothing in which he was disguised, Gasquoine fought desperately.

The struggle was of but short duration.

The assassin was struggling with a man used to encounters, and in a few minutes the baffled Frenchman was overpowered and securely handcuffed.

In the meantime, the girl Emily had recovered.

During the struggle the wig had been torn from the rescuer's head, and Miss Mermier asked:

"Who are you?"

"Fear not; it is Philip Tremaine," was the reply.

"That man would have murdered me."

"His actions would have led one to judge so, I reckon."

"A second time you have saved my life!"

"As your life has twice been in jeopardy, I am glad that I have been near to protect you."

At this moment the Gypsy Detective uttered a low whistle, and after a short interval his signal was answered, and two men approached.

"There's your prisoner," said the gypsy.

"Where?" asked the men.

"That man there," said the gypsy, pointing toward the disguised Gasquoine.

"I do not see any man around here," replied one of the men.

"Well, arrest that woman then, and hold her in close custody until you hear from me."

"Ah! a masker!" exclaimed the man. "I understand," and he laid his hand upon Gasquoine's shoulder, and added, "Come, friend, I will give you a moonlight ride down to the village."

Gasquoine offered no resistance, but quietly followed the constable.

The scoundrel had been caught in his own trap.

Had he not been in female attire he would have objected to this summary arrest; as it was, he had nothing left but to submit.

After the departure of her attempted assassinator, Emily said:

"Do you know who that man is?"

"Yes," was the answer, conjoined with the

significant remark, "and I now know who you are, too."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, and I am sorry that you deceived me."

"I did not deceive you."

"Will you still attempt to deny that your name is Frances Gasquoine?"

"I did not know that my name was Frances Gasquoine until a few moments ago, when so informed by Victor."

"And you really believed yourself to be only an adopted daughter, until this man revealed the truth?"

"I did; and I have only his word for believing otherwise now."

"If Victor Gasquoine told you that your name was Frances Gasquoine, he told you the truth."

Emily, or rather Frances, now related all the conversation that had transpired between her and her cousin.

When her story was ended, the gypsy said:

"I believe that every word that man told you was the truth, but he did not tell you all the facts."

"What fact did he conceal?"

"The fact that you were your father's sole heiress, and that he has secured possession of your property by means of forgery."

Some further conversation followed, as the gypsy and his lovely companion walked back toward the home of the Urquharts.

Upon the following day the four detectives met once more together.

Two of their number wore pleasant and gratified smiles upon their countenances.

It was evident that they had met some wonderful success.

Old Sleuth was peculiarly genial and jovial.

After lighting cigars all round, the famous detective said:

"Well, comrades, what reports have you got to make?"

The Lightning Detective was the first to reply, he said:

"Gentlemen, I feel that I must draw out of this case, and give my whole attention to the recovery of my child."

"Ye mustn't draw out of it at all on that account!" exclaimed Fergus Connors, the Irish Detective.

Right at this point the Lightning Detective betrayed the wonderful sagacity which distinguished him.

He recognized at once, from the tones of Connors' voice, that that good-natured, brave man had something important to communicate, and he said:

"Have you news for me?"

"Yes; a bit of news; but it would be as well to hear, first, what Sleuth has to say, for I see, by his smiling face, that he has made a ten strike."

"Well, Connors, my friend, you are not far wrong; I have made a ten strike."

"Well, give it to us."

"Do you recollect, boys, when we opened the tin box, and found the stolen bonds?"

His companions assented, when Sleuth resumed, and said:

"Well, I found something else in that box more valuable than the bonds."

None of the others spoke, when Sleuth continued:

"I found a small bit of paper about two inches square, covered over with strangely written characters."

Here he stopped, when the gypsy remarked: "Go right ahead with your story, old man. Don't expect us to act like women, and pump it out of you."

"Well, I thought I wouldn't say anything about that bit of paper until I had studied it, and learned the secret of those figures."

"Did you succeed?" asked Connors.

"I did."

"Well, what did you find?"

"I found old Gasquoine's will."

This announcement was received with exclamations of gladness.

Sleuth further explained that the paper was merely a memorandum in cipher, as to where the will had been secreted.

"Have you secured the will?" asked the gypsy.

"Yes; I have secured the will!" returned Sleuth; "but I was compelled to open old Gasquoine's grave to get it."

"Had they buried it with him?"

"Yes; and Mrs. Vance was the cunning woman who thus hid, without destroying it."

Further explanations followed, when the Lightning Detective, turning to Connors, said:

"Now, my friend, we will hear from you."

"Well, I have a noble surprise for you, my man," said Connors, as he arose and left the room with a significant smile upon his face.

CHAPTER XLII.

In a few moments the Irish Detective returned leading a little girl by the hand, whose features were concealed by a heavy black veil.

As he came into the room, he said:

"We have all been busy, my friend Griffin, and while you were working for others, there was some one working for you."

The moment Connors entered the door, leading the girl by the hand, a wondrous change came over the face of the Lightning Detective.

His handsome features were worked by conflicting emotions as he tremblingly exclaimed:

"Heaven grant that there may be no mistake, my friends!"

"Not much of a mistake this time!" replied Connors, as he withdrew the veil from the girl's face, and disclosed the features of the little maiden whom both he and the gypsy had met at the robber's den near the banks of the Hudson.

The Lightning Detective gave one wild glance at the face of the girl, when an exclamation of joy burst from his lips, and he rushed toward her with extended arms.

The girl also betrayed great emotion, and a look of recognition flashed over her face, as she exclaimed:

"Papa! papa!"

And the long-separated father and daughter were clasped in each other's arms.

We will not dwell upon the scene. It was a long and tender one, and drew tears from the eyes even of the other three men, who wept in sympathy with their comrade's joy.

At length the Lightning Detective found time to offer his thanks to the Irish Detective, and the former was not stinted in the expression of them.

"Now, see here!" exclaimed the good-natured Connors, as he drew his coat-sleeve across his eyes, "you need not go on in that way! I only did for ye what ye would have done for me, and it's all right and square!"

Shortly after, Barrett Griffin started with his newly found daughter to a prominent hotel, from whence he telegraphed the joyful news to his wife.

In the meantime, the three other officers remained holding a consultation as to their future movements.

Addressing Sleuth, the gypsy asked:

"Have you got possession of the will?"

"I have," was the answer.

"Have you made yourself master of its contents?"

"Yes."

"Well, who is the real heir?"

"The missing girl, Frances Gasquoine."

"The supposed adopted daughter?"

"Yes."

"Then she really is the old man's daughter, eh?"

"Yes; in fact, I 'twigg'd' that, my boy, during my first interview with the old millionaire."

"And how did you happen to come to that conclusion?"

"I saw from the first that he was more anxious to recover the girl than the stolen bonds."

"Then there is not the least particle of doubt as to her being the true heir, and child of the old man?"

"Not the least."

"And she is made the sole legatee?"

"Yes."

"Will there be any difficulty in establishing her claims, in case she is found?"

"Not the least."

"Well, I think that I can find her in about two hours and a half," said the gypsy.

Sleuth nearly leaped to the ceiling, as he exclaimed:

"That is immense! find her, and we have all got a fortune!"

"She is already in custody."

"In whose custody?"

"In mine."

"Where is she?"

"Stopping at the house of my friends, the Urquharts."

"Well, this is wonderful! How did you come to gain possession of her?"

The gypsy told his story.

"By thunder!" exclaimed Sleuth, when he heard the narration, "then it was really the girl I was after who jumped overboard at the Williamsburg ferry, the morning I 'piped' Gasquoine."

"Yes, and she was rescued by the man who would have destroyed her afterward."

"How is it that you failed to let us know all this time that you had the girl in custody?"

"I did not know that she really was Frances Gasquoine until last night."

"Did she deny her identity?"

"Yes."

"How did you finally discover that she was the girl?"

The gypsy related his adventure of the night previous.

When he had concluded his narration, Sleuth said:

"Then, boys, our work in this case is done. We have recovered the bonds, the old man's will, and the missing girl; the job is ended, and it will be a long time before I undertake another."

"Our job is not ended yet," said the gypsy.

"What remains for us to do?"

"We must convict Gasquoine of forgery or murder; and we must break up the gang headed by Nolen."

"That duty belongs to the regular force," said Old Sleuth.

Upon the following day, Frances Gasquoine was sitting in her room, thinking over the exciting events of her life, when Mrs. Urquhart entered and told her that she had a distinguished visitor below stairs.

"Who is it?" asked Frances.

"Old Sleuth, the detective," was the reply.

Frances turned deathly white, as she replied:

"Oh, my Heavens! what shall I do?"

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Mrs. Urquhart.

"I know that man Sleuth is in the employ of Victor Gasquoine."

"I will risk all the harm in your behalf that good old Sleuth means to do you."

Frances was finally persuaded to go downstairs, when Sleuth, in a business-like manner, said:

"Miss Gasquoine, I was employed by your father to perform certain work; I have done so, with my companions, successfully; and, as your father's sole representative, I wish to ask whether you are willing to carry out your father's contract with me?"

"Mr. Gasquoine may have been my father, sir," replied Frances, "but, sir, his cruel treatment of me in life is followed in his death; he has left me penniless and powerless to carry out any contract he may have had with you."

"I beg your pardon, miss; before your father died, he not only did you full justice as far as lay in his power, but he also honored the memory of your mother, and in his will attested his conviction of her innocence, and the wrong he had done her!"

"Thank Heaven for that! But you speak of his will, and his having done me justice?"

"Yes; he did you justice in that."

"How? By leaving his money to Victor Gasquoine, my cousin?"

"He did not leave one dollar to Victor Gasquoine. The will presented by that man was a forgery."

"And have you seen another will?"

"Yes; the true one."

"And who is the legatee?"

"You are sole heir to all of your father's great wealth."

"Then you can rely upon my fulfilling his intentions to the letter," said Frances, as she arose to call Mrs. Urquhart into the room.

CHAPTER XLIII.

In the presence of the woman who had been so kind to her, Frances Gasquoine told her story.

During her narration, she proved the fact that she had told the truth concerning herself to the Gypsy Detective.

She had been educated by two old maidens, whom she had been led to believe were relatives.

She had, also, believed her real name to be Mermier.

When Sleuth asked her if she never suspected the fact that she was her pretended adopted father's real child, she answered:

"That there were times when she suspected that such was the fact, and that after his death

she had entered the house and played the rôle of ghost, in hopes of making some discovery concerning herself.

Again Sleuth asked her how she had managed to make him unconscious by a simple wave of her hand.

The use of a drug accounted for this singular phenomenon.

In turn the detective told of his business with the old millionaire, and explained many other matters that were new to the suddenly discovered heiress.

A week subsequent to the interview above related, the genuine will was offered for probate.

Sufficient evidence was produced to establish it, and it was recognized as the last will and testament of the rich man.

Once in possession of her property, Frances paid the full amount of the reward that had been offered by her parent, and the four detectives found themselves comparatively rich men.

The Lightning Detective, who was already a wealthy man, declined to take his share under any circumstances, and the portion due him was divided between the other three.

In obedience to the desires of the real heiress, Victor Gasquoine was not prosecuted, being permitted to go free on condition of leaving the country forever.

From the moment that it had been discovered that the supposed Emily Mermier was really

Frances Gasquoine, the Gypsy Detective had not seen or spoken to her.

Once the wealthy young lady had sent a message to him, and the answer she received was that his duties did not allow him to make visits of courtesy.

And thus the time rolled by.

Frances Gasquoine went to Europe, while the three detectives attended to their several avocations.

The Lightning Detective had returned to St. Louis, and having recovered his daughter, laid off the harness of a detective, and assumed the rôle of a gentleman of wealth and culture.

The Irish Detective retired to his farm, and after some months, in a letter, said to one of his former comrades:

"My hand has become so used to the hafte of a plow, that I doubt whether I could slip the darbies over the biggest gawk that ever robbed a hen-roost."

Sleuth, having a wonderful financial turn, was enabled to carry out the ambition of his life, and became a partner in a banking-house.

The Gypsy Detective kept his word. He said that he would run Nolen and his gang to earth, and he succeeded in doing so.

His feats of daring were marvelous, and he came through many very small holes, but in the end he had the satisfaction of knowing that the dangerous organization was completely destroyed.

Having successfully accomplished this great undertaking, he decided to take a vacation and go to Europe.

He did so, and when he returned a year later, he brought with him a bride.

While in Paris during a popular tumult, the carriage of a young lady was upset, and the wild rabble were about to commit an assault upon the occupants, when an elegant young stranger leaped to the rescue, and successfully drove off the maddened mob.

The young lady proved to be very wealthy, and the gallant man who rescued her was rewarded finally with her love.

That our readers may not be left to do any guessing, we will record a remark made by the bride, a short time after the wedding.

The young husband said, one day, addressing his wife:

"Frances, you did not marry me from a feeling of gratitude only, I trust?"

"Philip Tremaine," was the reply, "I loved you from the night when you rescued me from a fate worse than death."

Thus, as our readers will observe, the gypsy secured the greatest reward after all.

He obtained great wealth, and the most beautiful bride of her day.

New York is his home, and he is still a young man; and what is more, both he and his wife are real living characters, and the main incidents of our story are but the record of facts.

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